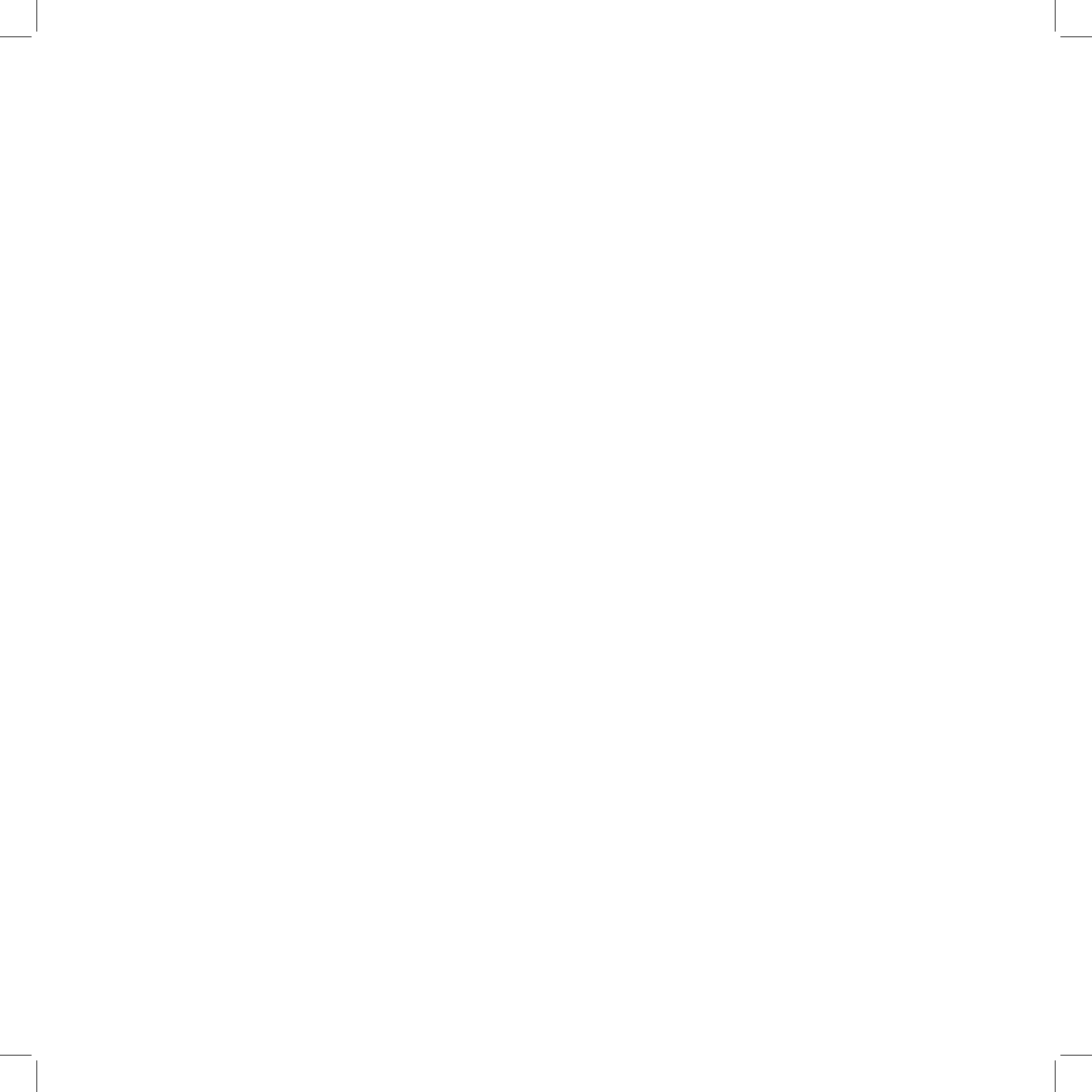
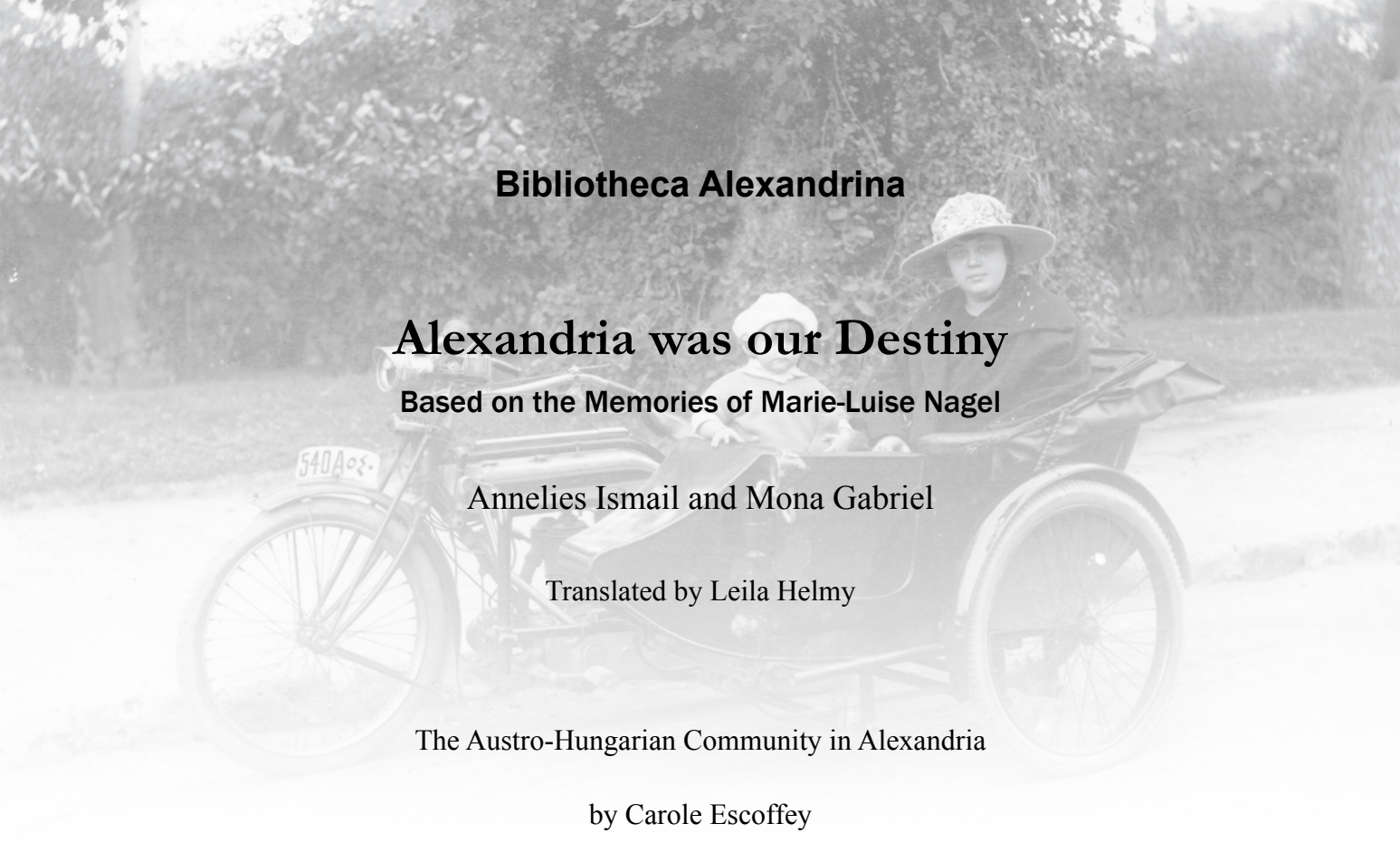


Alexandria was our Destiny

Based on the Memories of Marie-Luise Nagel





Bibliotheca Alexandrina

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Based on the Memories of Marie-Luise Nagel

Annelies Ismail and Mona Gabriel

Translated by Leila Helmy

The Austro-Hungarian Community in Alexandria

by Carole Escoffey

EDITORS

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EDITORS' PREFACE

Marie-Luise Nagel's family history encapsulates how during the nineteenth century many Europeans were drawn to Egypt, and to Alexandria in particular, gradually transforming it into a vibrant cosmopolitan city.

When the author of this book, Annelies Ismail, met Marie-Luise Nagel in 2008 amongst the remaining German-speaking women of Alexandria, she was fascinated by her tales of a bygone era. As Marie-Luise recounted her family's origins and her own memories, Annelies soon realized that there was enough material for a fascinating book and began to prepare a manuscript for publication in German. However, the Nagel family saga is of interest not only to the German-speaking public, but also to Alexandrians today as a chapter in their city's cosmopolitan history, in addition to the wider English-speaking public with a thirst for both history and biography. Thus, when Annelies Ismail presented her manuscript to the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center hoping to publish it in English also, it was obvious that this tale should form part of the Alex Med Monograph Series.

The arrival from Central Europe of a significant number of citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is far less known than that of other nationalities such as the Greeks, Italians, Armenians and Lebanese, who formed important communities in Alexandria. In comparison, the Austro-Hungarian presence was much more discrete but nonetheless significant and constitutes an interesting chapter of Euro-Mediterranean history. In her introduction on the History of the Austro-Hungarian Community in Alexandria, Carole Escoffey retraces the development of that community, from the initial diplomatic ties, to the influx of immigrants due to the Suez

Canal, to the vicissitudes it went through during two world wars and the exodus provoked by the Suez Crisis and the nationalizations of the Nasserite era.

Finally, this monograph evokes the ever-changing fate of Alexandria itself, as it has alternately thrived and buckled in the face of historical events. The reader discovers, through the eyes of Marie-Luise Nagel, the continuing destiny of this ancient city, a city which has transformed the lives of people of diverse origins, while being itself transformed by their passage.

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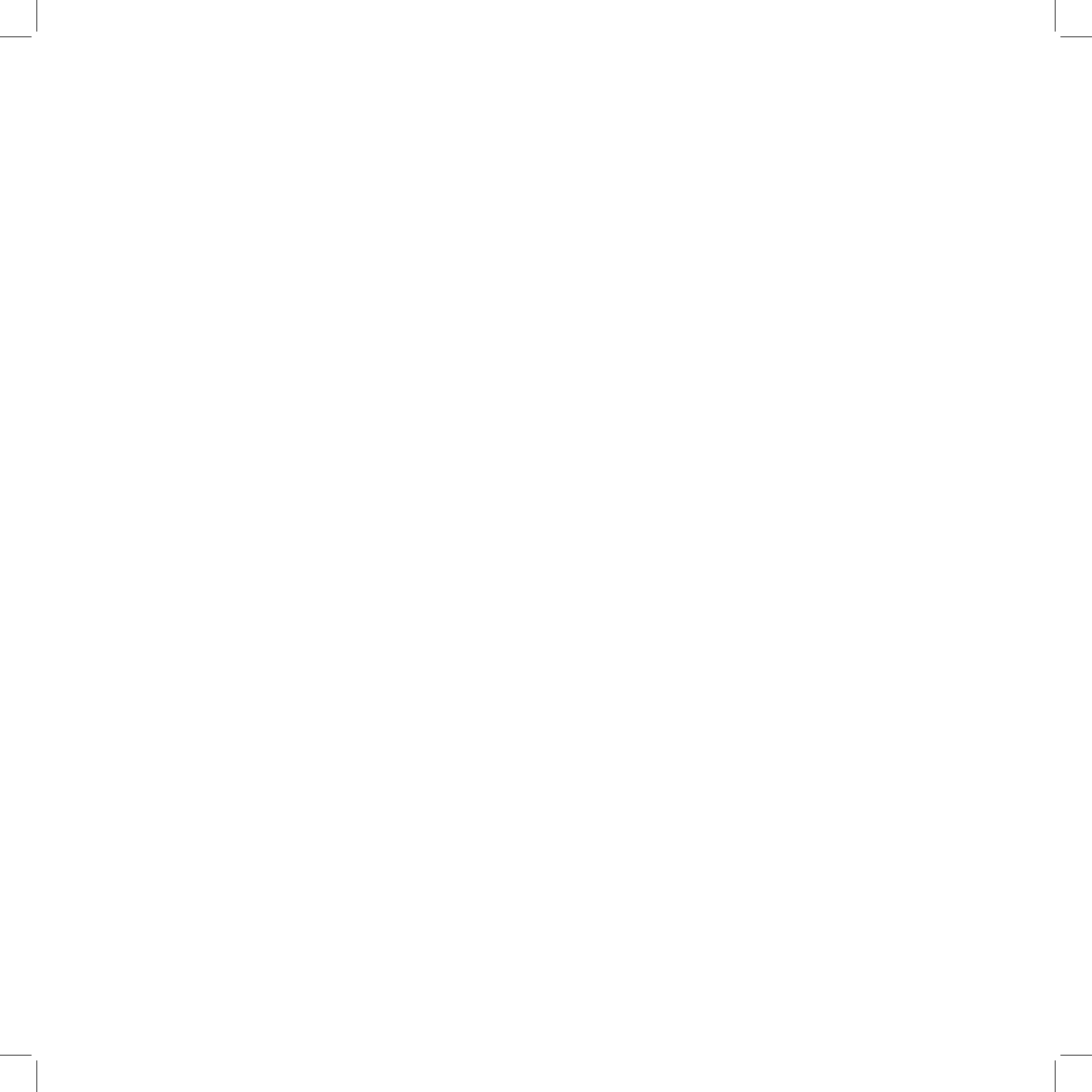
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Introduction

Come with me to Alexandria! Let this city with its beautiful old houses enchant you. The Corniche along the sea lures you with the colors of the water, from deep blue to turquoise. The sky is clear and blue. The water is at times also grey and the sky overcast and hazy. A *nawa* is brewing—a storm with strong winds and rain—and the streets are empty. These *nawas* occur in the winter months. In a few days the din is over and the air is wonderful again, as if washed clean. The people reappear and enjoy the city, delighting in the Corniche. This road extends for 25 km along the sea. Alexandria used to be called the “Pearl of the Mediterranean Sea”. I can still envision that Alexandria, even if the streets are often unclean and the beautiful houses are partially falling into decay. A lot is now being renovated, but that is not enough.

What is so fascinating about this city that so many people want to spend their lives in it? It certainly is not what it was eighty years ago and yet many people who left are haunted by the longing to return.

This is the story of two families—the Nagel family from Vienna and the Giurgevich family from Dalmatia—who immigrated to Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time many people sought their welfare and security in Egypt. There prevailed an atmosphere of optimism and a strong conviction of progress that was unique. Experts from all over the world were brought to Egypt to launch a new era. It was the opportunity of work and prosperity which attracted many foreigners from Europe, including Marie-Luise Nagel's ancestors.

In the year 1856, the first railroad was inaugurated in Egypt, linking Cairo and Alexandria. In 1858, Helene Nagel, a midwife from Vienna, was to make the train journey from Alexandria to Cairo during her first visit to Egypt. From 1857 to 1869 the Suez Canal was built to facilitate trade between Asia and Europe. In 1869, Helene Nagel was invited to attend the inauguration of the Suez Canal, accompanied by her young nephew August. By this time they were both living in Alexandria. During the inauguration ceremonies she met Khedive Ismail, the then ruler of Egypt, and her young nephew August met and spoke to Ferdinand de Lesseps. It was this crucial meeting which would inspire the young boy to become an engineer himself. As early as 1838, the Austrian engineer Alois Negrelli had developed the designs for the construction of the canal. However, the idea of digging a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea was much older. There is a letter from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to King Louis XIV of France, in which this idea is described. Napoleon Bonaparte, as well, during his expedition to Egypt in 1798, ordered measurements to be made for the construction of a canal. But it was not till 1854 that Ferdinand de Lesseps found support for the project with the viceroy of Egypt at the time. In 1858 the company for the construction of the canal was established.

Construction began in 1859 and faced incredible tensions and political obstacles. Most of the building materials had to be imported from Europe and a total of one and a half million people, mainly Egyptians, took part in the construction. One hundred and twenty-five thousand died during the digging, mainly due to disease.

It was not till 1869 that the inauguration of the canal took place, with the attendance of many dignitaries, royalty and guests from Europe. The opera *Aida*, that Giuseppe Verdi was to compose for the inauguration, was, unfortunately, not ready in time. It was not performed till 1872 in Cairo at the new opera house.

Two women of the family of Marie-Luise Nagel still impress us today on account of their courage and determination to take their lives into their own hands. The first, Helene Nagel (1834–1899), traveled on her own from Vienna in Austria, which was then ruled by Emperor Franz Joseph, to Alexandria where she lived and practiced her profession for many years and became very rich. The other woman, Maria Polovineo (1834?–c.1890), left Korcula in Dalmatia as a young widow with two children and traveled to Saint Petersburg in Russia. She lived there for many years as a lady-in-waiting at the court of Czar Alexander II, before returning to Korcula. Her daughter Francesca later immigrated to Egypt in 1889 with her husband, Franz Giurgevich, an engineer and inventor. Alexandria, the Pearl of the Mediterranean Sea, became the destiny for both families.

Thus, this book recounts a family saga from the middle of the nineteenth century to our present time. Women play a major role in it and we soon discover that emancipation is not as new as we may imagine today. Women at that time, just like men, had a difficult life.

In 2008, I met Marie-Luise Nagel, who is the descendant of Maria Polovineo and a relative of Helene Nagel, amongst the German ladies of Alexandria. At that time she was eighty-seven years old. I had already heard many a story about these foreign women who live in Alexandria. Germans, Austrians and Swiss belong to my closer circle of acquaintances. All their stories fascinated me from the start. Of Marie-Luise Nagel I only knew that she was born an Austrian, but not how she ended up in Alexandria.

We were sitting one morning in the garden of Sporting Club in Alexandria. There was a whole row of women present many of whom had known Marie-Luise for a long period of time. Her stories fascinated them all. On that day Marie-Luise was elegantly dressed as usual, in a green outfit with beautifully matching high-heeled shoes and handbag. Her long hair was still light-brown, with white streaks interspersed. She wore her hair pinned up. We asked her fervently to tell us how Alexandria used to be in her youth and Marie-Luise began to tell us her tale. She spoke in perfect German with a light accent that sounded a little how a Hungarian would speak German. This is amazing, because German is not her best language: she prefers to speak in French or Italian. She told me that she only began to use German again through her contact with the German ladies in Alexandria.

We asked her many questions. And so she began to tell us about her family, her youth and her beautiful Alexandria! This brought us to her ancestors, Maria Polovineo and Helene Nagel, the two ladies who lived three generations ago.

When I got to know Marie-Luise Nagel better, I asked her if I might record her memories. She had read my book, *My Husband is an Egyptian*, published in Germany in 2008. I gained her confidence and we decided to start working together. I questioned her regularly, recording her stories on an electronic recorder as she spoke. She has very clear memories of things

that happened over seventy years ago. We also searched her large box of photographs for pictures to include in the book. Later, she also sometimes came to visit me in my apartment in Alexandria where I have lived with my husband since 2004. Or else I visited her elegant apartment, decorated with many pieces of antique furniture collected by her family and herself over the years.

At one meeting in her flat she told me about her first marriage to an Englishman. She seemed almost sad. There were so many things going through her mind and sometimes she talked for long periods of time and I didn't dare to interrupt her. I recorded her stories and then wrote them down in chronological order, trying to retain her own words. We often had to go back to correct dates and names. Sometimes we had long discussions about arranging the dates in the correct order. She described how her father and uncles were interned by the British in the internment camp at Sidi Bishr during the First World War. She has also told me a lot about her personal life, allowing me to record everything. Her experiences of what happened during the Second World War and during the 1952 Revolution in Egypt are especially interesting. Although Marie-Luise is a very intelligent and reasonable woman, I also discovered that she is a bit superstitious, believing in the intervention of higher powers in her life.

In the spring of 2010, I finished the German manuscript. The first part is a narrative recreation of events based on the information that Marie-Luise Nagel told me about her ancestors and her early childhood. The second part is devoted to Marie-Luise's own memories, which we have pieced together in chronological order and kept in the first person. All of it was revised by my daughter, Mona Gabriel. She changed the order of the chapters and helped me to finalize the text. Marie-Luise Nagel would have preferred to publish the book in English because none of her relatives speak German. So I was wondering how I could accomplish

that when something happened that can only be described as a lucky coincidence. A friend of mine, Margret Lewerenz, drew my attention to a book series published at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina: the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center Monographs. I got an appointment with the center's director, Mohamed Awad and showed him my German manuscript. To my great delight he was willing to include it in the series. As we were conversing, Dr. Awad suddenly faltered and said, "Marie-Luise Nagel? But I know that family!" It turned out that his parents and his aunt had been friends with Marie-Luise Nagel. His aunt, Faika, nicknamed Fufa, had repeatedly cropped up in Marie-Luise's memories. Indeed, she was one of Marie-Luise's best friends with whom she had made all those outings and attended social events!

Afterwards, when I told this to Marie-Luise she became thoughtful and sad because that friend had died some years ago. However, she remembers the nephew, Mohamed Awad, quite clearly. She had carried him in her arms when he was but a week old! She told me that when he meets her in the street, he always greets her lovingly. The world is small, even in Alexandria now a city of about six million inhabitants and Alexandrians remain very close.

Then I undertook further research into the background of the Nagel and Giurgevich families. Carole Escoffey, the editor of this book, suggested that we should try to find the tombs of Marie-Luise's family. After talking to Marie-Luise I had a good idea where these tombs would be found. Carole Escoffey and I met at the Catholic cemetery in Chatby and there it was quite easy to find the tomb of the Nagel family. All the names of the people buried are written on the tombstone together with their dates of birth and death. We thus discovered dates which we had not been able to determine accurately before. We also searched for the Giurgevich family tombs, but with no luck. We first looked at all the loculi because Marie-Luise had told me that her maternal grandmother, Francesca Giurgevich,




Marie-Luise Nagel on her ninetieth birthday with her niece Allison and great nephew Jean Paul who both came especially from South Africa for the occasion

had been buried in one. After that we asked the caretaker of the cemetery to show us the burial records. In one of those registries we found the name of Francesca Giurgevich, 1861–1936, and the place indicated where she was buried. However, the caretaker then informed us that sadly that part of Chatby cemetery had been destroyed to build the new electric power station. We then searched for other tombs belonging to the Giurgevich family but discovered several areas of Chatby's Catholic cemetery where old graves had been destroyed to make space for new tombs. We were told that this happens frequently with graves when no relatives come to take care of them. It is a pity that this part of Alexandria's cosmopolitan history is now disappearing in such a way. We walked around the cemetery for a while and all the names of people from Italy, Austria, France, Germany and other countries kept us thinking of the lives behind the names. Where had they come from originally, how had they led their lives in Alexandria?

On 12 May of this year Marie-Luise celebrated her ninetieth birthday. She was very excited because she expected her niece to come especially from South Africa. And indeed her niece Allison arrived together with her son Jean Paul. They traveled from Cape Town to Alexandria just to see Marie-Luise on her birthday. No one else from the family is still living here in Alexandria. Carole Escoffey and I went to her apartment to meet her relatives and to take photos of them on that day. We also took one of Samir, Marie-Luise's trusted Nubian servant. Later that day Marie-Luise and her relatives met with a group of friends to celebrate. I think it was a happy day for her!

Annelies Ismail

Alexandria, July 2011



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XXIII

The Austro-Hungarian Community in Alexandria

The history of the Austro-Hungarian presence in Egypt reflects changes which took place in both Egypt and Europe. The Austrian Empire was founded in 1804, and then in 1867 a union between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary was to create the Austro-Hungarian Empire which lasted until its dissolution in 1918 at the end of World War One. Thus, what constitutes Austrian citizenship has changed over time: some territories which were once in the Austro-Hungarian Empire are today part of other Central European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia and Hungary. The island of Korcula in Dalmatia, where Francesca Giurgevich was born, became part of the Austrian Empire in 1815, by 1921 it was part of Yugoslavia and today it is in Croatia. This briefly gives an idea how many of the people who once came to Egypt as Austrian citizens, would have had a different citizenship today.

During the same period, Egypt also underwent considerable development which was to create an influx of immigrants from Central Europe and elsewhere. In 1801, the Ottoman rulers of Egypt sent a force to end the French occupation of the country by Bonaparte (1798–1801). This force included an Albanian unit led by a young Albanian officer, Mohamed Ali. By 1805, Mohamed Ali had become the new *wali*, or governor, of Egypt, and in time he would become the *khedive*, or viceroy, and establish hereditary rule for his family. Mohamed Ali soon embarked on a vast modernization program of Egypt, which included the economy, agriculture, education and army. This modernization was to create a continuous flow of immigrants from Europe and the Mediterranean region throughout the nineteenth century, attracted by the new opportunities for work and prosperity. Part of Mohamed Ali's modernization program included the renaissance of Alexandria as the first port of Egypt: he gave orders to renovate the port, to establish a shipyard and an arsenal. In 1817–1820 the Mahmoudieh Canal was built linking the city to the Nile, providing not only a means of transport but also a fresh water supply. A building boom ensued which was to change the face of the city. The construction of the Suez Canal in the 1860s and the Egyptian cotton boom, a consequence of the American Civil War of 1861–1865, brought yet more immigrants. Moreover, to attract foreign expertise and entrepreneurs to Egypt, Mohamed Ali granted them special privileges such as tax exemptions. The system of treaties known as Capitulations was introduced, which meant that foreigners whose country had signed such a treaty with the Ottoman rulers were not subject to Egyptian jurisdiction and came under their own consular protection. In 1875, the Mixed Courts were established under Khedive Ismail, Mohamed Ali's grandson, to settle disputes between Egyptians and foreigners or between foreigners of different nationalities. These legal privileges for foreigners came to an end in 1949, twelve years after it was decided to abolish them at the Montreux Convention of 1937.

Under these circumstances, the Austro-Hungarian colony in Egypt experienced many changes over the years. By 1865, the population of Alexandria had increased to 180,000 from a mere 5,000 in the mid eighteenth century. Between just 1863 and 1866 the Austrian Consulate counted an astounding increase in the number of Austrian subjects in the whole of Egypt from 3,000 to 9,000. Due to the Suez Canal, about 2,000 of these, mostly from Dalmatia, settled in Port Said, and a further 4,000 were living in Ismailia and El Kantara. For this reason, Austria established a consular agency in Port Said and in Ismailia in 1866 and 1867 respectively. In 1869, the inauguration of the Suez Canal was attended by European royalty including Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria. By 1905, the Austro-Hungarian colony was in fifth place after the Greeks, Italians, British and French. In 1907, it counted 7,704 persons, of which 3,158 were living in Alexandria. Interestingly, the higher numbers of women among Austrian immigrants was due to the number of young women from Slovenia who came seeking work as servants with wealthy European families.¹

In addition to subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a number of Ottoman subjects were also under Austrian consular protection. These were considered as “de facto” citizens. Moreover, in 1854 the Jewish community of Alexandria also came under Austro-Hungarian protection. During World War One however, most Jews renounced Austro-Hungarian protection, which thus came to an end in 1915.

During that era, a number of Austrian visitors to Alexandria are worthy of note. Archduke Ludwig Salvator—a second cousin of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria—would often spend the winter in Alexandria on his estate in San Stefano district. In 1900, he published a book entitled *Ramleh als Winteraufenthalt, (Ramleh as a Winter Resort)*, describing in detail the inhabitants, the fauna and flora, the climate, and the streets and houses of Ramleh stretching from Sidi Gaber to Montazah and Aboukir to the east of Alexandria. Imperial visitors also

included Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria in 1881, who described what he saw in Alexandria in his *Eine Orientreise (An Oriental Travel)* published in 1884. His mother, the Empress Elizabeth, also visited Alexandria in 1885. The Egyptian ruling family also had connections with Austria. Khedive Abbas Helmi (Abbas II), the great-great-grandson of Mohamed Ali, was educated in Switzerland and Austria. His second wife was a Hungarian noblewoman, Countess May Torok von Szendro, whom he secretly married in Montazah Palace, Alexandria.

The outbreak of World War One brought an end to the Austro-Hungarian presence in Alexandria. The commander of the British army of occupation, Sir John Maxwell, ordered that every Austrian, German and Hungarian citizen register at his governorate. Many Austrians and Hungarians were interned in the barracks at Ras El Tin and at Sidi Bishr in Alexandria. When these detention camps became full, they began to ship the remaining Austrians and Hungarians to Malta and Cyprus. Then when Italy declared war on Austria in 1915, the remaining Austro-Hungarian citizens in Egypt had to declare their sympathy for either Russia or Italy. Finally, many of those who came from Dalmatia, renounced their Austrian nationality and requested Italian protection. Thus by 1919, the number of Austrian citizens registered in Alexandria had gone down to about 500.

Diplomatic Ties

The history of the Austrian Consulate in Alexandria has been traced back as far as 1763 making it one of the six oldest existing Austrian consulates. At that time Alexandria's population was barely 5,000. A Venetian merchant, Francesco Agostini of the trading company Brandi & Agostini, was appointed consular agent in Alexandria and then six

years later in 1769, he became imperial royal vice consul. His appointment was intended to promote trade between Trieste, then a free port in the Hapsburg Empire, and Alexandria. A few years later, in 1781, the Austrian Consulate of Alexandria was officially recognised by the Ottoman Empire. At that time Austrian consuls in the Levant did not receive a salary, but were entitled to a *cottimo*: a consular tax determined by the Austrian minister in Constantinople. In time, the *cottimo* was set at 2% of the value of any cargo transported by an Austrian ship which called in the port. Initially, this was insufficient to cover the consul's expenses, so the Austrian authorities usually appointed either consuls of other powers or else wealthy merchants to act as their consul. During the nineteenth century many changes took place and the number of consular employees grew after 1825 when Emperor Franz Joseph I approved the appointment of civil servants in the ports with which Austria traded intensely, including Alexandria. By 1845, the consular staff in Alexandria included two dragomans, one registry clerk, two chancery clerks, one *bawab* and three *kawasses*.

The Austrian consuls in Egypt were to include two eminent Egyptologists among their number. The first of these was Anton von Laurin (1789–1869), appointed consul general in Alexandria in 1834. Laurin was a collector of antiquities who undertook excavations in Alexandria, Sakkara and Giza. Part of his collection, which he sold to Hapsburg Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, later went to a museum in Vienna, including eleven stelae, three mummies, one sarcophagus and two basins for offerings. Moreover, to his home town of Vipava in Slovenia, he sent two ancient stone sarcophagi discovered amongst the tombs of the courtiers at the base of the pyramids of Giza. Today, these two sarcophagi are to be found in Vipava's cemetery, one containing Laurin's parents, the other his son Albert who died young.² Laurin was also an able diplomat: during his posting in Alexandria, the strained relations between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, which sought independence, enabled Laurin to intervene between Sultan Mahmoud II and Viceroy Mohamed Ali. Having

succeeded in calming the situation for a while he was knighted by the emperor of Austria, Ferdinand I. The second Egyptologist, Christian Wilhelm Huber (1804–1871), appointed Austrian consul general in Alexandria in 1850, became known for his numismatic and archeological collections. The latter collection remained in Egypt and was to form the basis of the Egyptian Museum's collection. In 1852, Huber was joined by the eminent Austrian Orientalist, Alfred von Kremer (1828–1889), who was to occupy a diplomatic post in Alexandria for several years. In 1886, the British Museum bought Kremer's collection of Oriental manuscripts, including Al Ghazali's *Maqasid Al Falasifa*, (*Intentions of the Philosophers*).³

The importance of the European consuls in Egypt especially has been underlined by the French physician Antoine Clot Bey (1793–1868), who was chief surgeon to Mohamed Ali: "The consuls general of Alexandria differer greatly from those in the Levant. Due to the importance of Egypt under Mehmet Ali, the position of consul general of an [sic] European power with the viceroy, is of the utmost diplomatic importance. The consuls general of France, England, Russia and Austria are real ambassadors. They maintain close relations with the viceroy, transmit their governments' official *démarches* to him, and discuss important political issues with him. The consul general is the head of the colony of his fellow countrymen. He rules them according to the capitulations with the Ottoman Empire. He has jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters..."⁴

The outbreak of World War One marked the end of the presence of Austro-Hungarian diplomats in Egypt. In September 1914, the Austrian vice consul received a letter from the commanding officer of the British army of occupation requesting him to leave the country with all the consular officials. Both the Austrian and the German consuls with their families sailed from the port of Alexandria a few days later. At first the protection of the Austrian consulate was entrusted to the Italian consul general, but when Italy declared war on



The staff of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate of Alexandria on the occasion of the celebration of the birthday of Emperor Franz Joseph, 1913

Austria in 1915, this protective role was taken over by the United States' consul. Then in 1917, when the United States severed diplomatic relations with Austria, the role passed on to the Dutch consul. Moreover, as an increasing number of Austrian and Hungarian citizens fled Egypt, many of them sent their belongings to the Austrian consulate, which the Dutch consul described as resembling a "warehouse".

The consulates of European powers in Alexandria often changed their premises which they generally rented. Thus the Austro-Hungarian Consulate rented a number of different houses, usually from Austro-Hungarian citizens. From 1883-1897 the consulate rented a house belonging to the Daira of Prince Toussoun at 3 Rue Rosette (which later became Avenue Fouad). It was not until 1897 however that a consulate designed by the Austrian architect Miklavetz was built in the grounds of the head of the Austro-Hungarian colony, the Hungarian banker Baron Jacques de Menasce⁵, in Rue Dr. Zancarol near to Zizinia Theater. By 1913 however, the consulate had moved to 2 Rue d'Allemagne. Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire came to an end in 1918, the consulate remained until 1921. When it was finally liquidated, the contents were given to the Egyptian public custodian, while most of the archives were handed over to the Italian consul general by the Dutch consul.

A year later, in 1922 the Republic of Austria opened an honorary consulate at 8 Rue Sidi El Metwali with Oskar Stroß, the son of Austrian businessman Emmanuel Stroß, as honorary consul. It would take much longer for an Austrian Consulate to be reopened after World War Two however. The *chargé d'affaires* of the Austrian delegation in Cairo noted in 1948 that there were a mere 105 Austrian citizens living in Alexandria.⁶ The confiscation of foreign property in 1961–1962 under Nasser's regime provoked yet more foreigners to leave. At that time it was decided to protect the remaining Austrian subjects by opening an honorary consulate in Alexandria. Thus in 1963, it was Austrian businessman Rudolf Luzianovich,



The Austro-Hungarian Consulate at 3 Rue Rosette

the grandson of a merchant from Dubrovnik who had emigrated to Alexandria in 1875, who became honorary consul. Luzianovich established the consulate at 8 Rue de l'Église Debbane, where it has remained to this day. In 1979, Rudolf Luzianovich retired and was replaced by an honorary consul of Egyptian nationality, Vahan Dikran Alexanian. Later in 1987, when he became honorary consul general, his daughter Astrid Vahan Alexanian-Papazian helped her father in the capacity of honorary consul. To this day, she occupies the position of consul of Austria in Alexandria.

Trade and the Professions

There were several prominent shops and businesses belonging to Austrian citizens in Alexandria. The Viennese businessman Salomon Stein ran a large department store at the corner between Mohamed Ali Square and the Rue des Soeurs. Stein owned a number of other stores in Levantine cities including Cairo, Tanta and Constantinople. Facing Stein's department store and also on Mohamed Ali Square, on the corner of Orabi Square, was a branch of another Viennese company, Albert Mayer & Co. Mayer sold menswear not only in Alexandria, but also in Cairo, Salonika and Constantinople. Opposite Mayer's store was that of yet another Viennese: Rudolf Kirchmayer. The presence of these Viennese stores can be explained by the fact that Egypt was the most important export market at that time for the Austrian textile industry.

In addition to shops, Austrians also owned a number of hotels and restaurants in Alexandria, including the New Khedivial Hotel at 15 Rue de la Porte de Rosette (today's Horreya Street) belonging to a Mr. Reinsburger.

Other businesses owned by Austro-Hungarians included Jacques L. Menasce et Fils, the first and largest Austro-Hungarian bank in Egypt with branches in Cairo and Alexandria. Mohr & Fenderl was an important cotton trading company. In 1865 the brothers Emmanuel and Gustav Stroß founded one of the most important merchant companies in Cairo. In 1882, they opened a branch in Vienna, and in 1884 the business was transferred to Alexandria.

Austrian imports included a great deal of bentwood to furnish not only hotels and restaurants, but also the private homes of Europeans living in Alexandria. By 1897, Egypt was



107 ALEXANDRIA. — Mehemet-Ali Place and French Garden. — LL.

A view across Mohamed Ali Square showing Albert Mayer's menswear shop on the right



Salomon Stein's department store located on the corner of Mohamed Ali Square and the Rue des Soeurs

the fourth largest market for the export of this kind of furniture, after Germany, Great Britain and France. To this day, chairs made by the Austrian bentwood manufacturers Thonet and Kohn can still be found in the antique dealers' shops of Attarin district in Alexandria. Egyptian exports to Austria would have included mummy powder, which had been exported to Europe on ships leaving the port of Alexandria since the Middle Ages. The various substances used in mummification, including asphalt, cinnamon, aloe vera, myrrh, oils and resins, had different properties which were considered medicinal and were used as a remedy for a wide range of ailments.⁷

The Austrian community included barristers of the Mixed Courts, bankers, lawyers, directors of important merchant houses, engineers, pharmacists, hotel managers, doctors and delegates of the Austrian Consulate. Austrian architects also contributed to the city. Antonio Lasciac (born Anton Laščak) from Gorizia when it was still part of Austria (today it is in Italy) designed a number of prominent buildings including the Galerie Menasce on Mohamed Ali Square in 1883–1887 and Cairo (Misr) Railway Station, with Greek engineer Leonidas Iconomopoulos, in 1915–1927. Miklavetz, a partner in Paraskevas & Miklavetz, designed not only the Austrian Consulate in the Rue d'Allemagne, but also a large apartment block at 65–67 Horreya Street, which stood opposite the Governorate of Alexandria building until the latter's destruction in the January 2011 Revolution.

The Austrian Lloyd: Travel between Austria and Alexandria

All of the Austro-Hungarian immigrants to Egypt came by ship. This became easy when the Austrian Lloyd was established in 1836. The route to Alexandria soon became important so in August 1837 a regular service began between Trieste and Alexandria. The ships of the Austrian Lloyd soon gained the reputation for providing fast and reliable service. Before World War One, the steamers of the Austrian Lloyd left Trieste every Thursday at 11.30 a.m. and after a short stop at Brindisi, arrived in Alexandria on Monday at 6 a.m. Thus, the Austrian Lloyd offered the fastest connection between Egypt and Central Europe. The reputation of the Austrian Lloyd's reliable service was such that the *Egyptian Gazette's* economic supplement appeared every Saturday just before the ship's departure, thus profiting from this fast connection for the distribution of the newspaper in Europe. In June 1915, however, the offices of the Austrian Lloyd in Alexandria, located at 5 Rue Debbane, were closed by the British military authorities.

The Imperial Royal Post Office in Alexandria

In 1837, soon after the Austrian Lloyd established a regular service to Alexandria, an Austrian post office was opened in the city. Initially, this post office was in the consulate, and the official running it received 6% of the postal revenues as his salary. In around 1860, it was transferred to the local agency of the Austrian Lloyd. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, when French ships stopped coming to Alexandria, the Austrian post office and the ships of the Austrian Lloyd were the only means of sending mail to Europe.

In 1874 Egypt joined the Universal Postal Union and began to deal directly with the other member states of the union. As a result, foreign post offices were no longer needed in Egypt and gradually began to close down. The Austrian post office in Alexandria was closed down in 1889. Its last known address was in the Rue de la Poste and it had seven employees.⁸

Welfare

In days when there was no social security system, the Austro-Hungarian community in Alexandria provided assistance to its poorest members. In 1879 it formed a benevolent society which in 1898 founded the Franz Joseph Asylum in the Rue du Port Est. This society was funded by the annual subscriptions, donations and revenue generated by events such as the annual ball of the Austro-Hungarian community which was a major event in Alexandria's social calendar. The Franz Joseph Asylum helped mostly poor maids who had come to work in Alexandria from Trieste, Gorizia and what is today's Slovenia.

In 1906, the asylum acquired a plot of land of 2,450m² in Rue Aly Bey Gogo in the Moharrem Bey district. In 1908, the benevolent society built an Austro-Hungarian Hospital on this plot. By 1916, Felix de Menasce, the younger brother of Baron Jacques de Menasce, took over the administration of the asylum and in 1922 even managed to prevent its liquidation by the British High Commissioner, Lord Allenby. However, after the outbreak of World War One, the Austro-Hungarian Hospital was sequestered in 1915, and by 1917 was rented to the Egyptian government to serve as a public hospital.

In 1931, the Austrian Consulate acquired the land belonging to the Franz Joseph Asylum and the Austro-Hungarian Hospital, and in 1935, the properties were sold to the Société Copte de Bienfaisance, Al Ikhlas.

Austria and the Roman Catholic Church in Egypt

The Emperor of Austria, as Apostolic King of Hungary, considered himself to be the protector of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ottoman Empire. In 1834, Emperor Ferdinand I donated 15,000 thaler to rebuild the dilapidated Saint Catherine's Church in Alexandria. Today, a marble plaque on the right of the altar attests to this. In 1850, Emperor Franz Joseph gave to the church a large painting depicting Saint Catherine.

Austria also gave support to the Catholic Copts of Egypt. The emperor donated annually to the Catholic Coptic Church from his private funds. In 1894, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch of Alexandria, Kyrillos Makarios, asked the emperor for funds to construct a new patriarchate. Emperor Franz Joseph and the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry each donated 10,000 francs towards the construction of the new church on a plot of land located between the Rue des Obélisques (today's Safia Zaghloul Street) and Ramleh Station. Interestingly, during the construction a number of columns, capitals, mosaics and other ancient artifacts were found, in addition to ancient crypts, supporting the belief that this was once part of the site of the Caesarium which was later converted into an early church and Christian burial ground. In 1902, the Church of the Holy Resurrection at Caesarium was consecrated by Patriarch Kyrillos, and until 1914, it also served as the parish church for the Austro-Hungarian community of Alexandria.



The Church of Saint Catherine



The marble plaque commemorating the support of Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria for the construction of Saint Catherine's Church

Today there are few Austrian citizens remaining in Alexandria. They are mostly Austrian ladies married to Egyptians. Marie-Luise Nagel is one of the few remaining descendants of the cosmopolitan communities which thrived here during the nineteenth century. The tale of her ancestors recounted in this book, in many ways reflects how, not only citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but citizens of many European countries came to settle in Egypt and Alexandria especially. Both of her grandfathers were qualified engineers possessing the kind of skills which were needed in Egypt at that time. August Nagel, having been employed by the Viennese railway, was ideally suited to working for the new Alexandria Tramway Company. Franz Giurgevich, trained as a ship builder, was drawn to work firstly as a shipping engineer in Port Said, before moving with his family to Alexandria where the shipyard also needed engineers.

Two generations later, many descendants of those nineteenth century immigrants, who by now considered themselves Alexandrians even if they retained the nationality of their ancestors, were obliged to leave. The two World Wars, the 1952 Revolution with the ensuing nationalisations and confiscation of property, as well as the Suez Crisis, meant that Egypt was no longer a land of opportunity welcoming foreigners. Those descendants, like Marie-Luise Nagel's relatives, left in search of a new future, some returning to Europe to countries like Switzerland or France, others establishing new lives further afield in Canada, South Africa and elsewhere.

Carole Escoffey

July 2011

Notes

1 Rudolf Agstner, *Von K.K. Konsularagentie zum Österreichischen Generalkonsulat; Österreich (-Ungarn) und Alexandrien 1763–1993*. Schriften des Österreichischen Kulturinstitutes, Volume 7. Cairo: 1993, p.287. For much of what follows on the Austrian presence and diplomatic ties in Alexandria, I am deeply indebted to Rudolf Agstner's book.

2 See <http://www.theslovenian.com/articles/soban1.htm>

3 See <http://www.yale.edu/religiousstudies/facultypages/JIS-2006.pdf>

4 Cited in Rudolf Agstner, *Op. Cit.*, p.285.

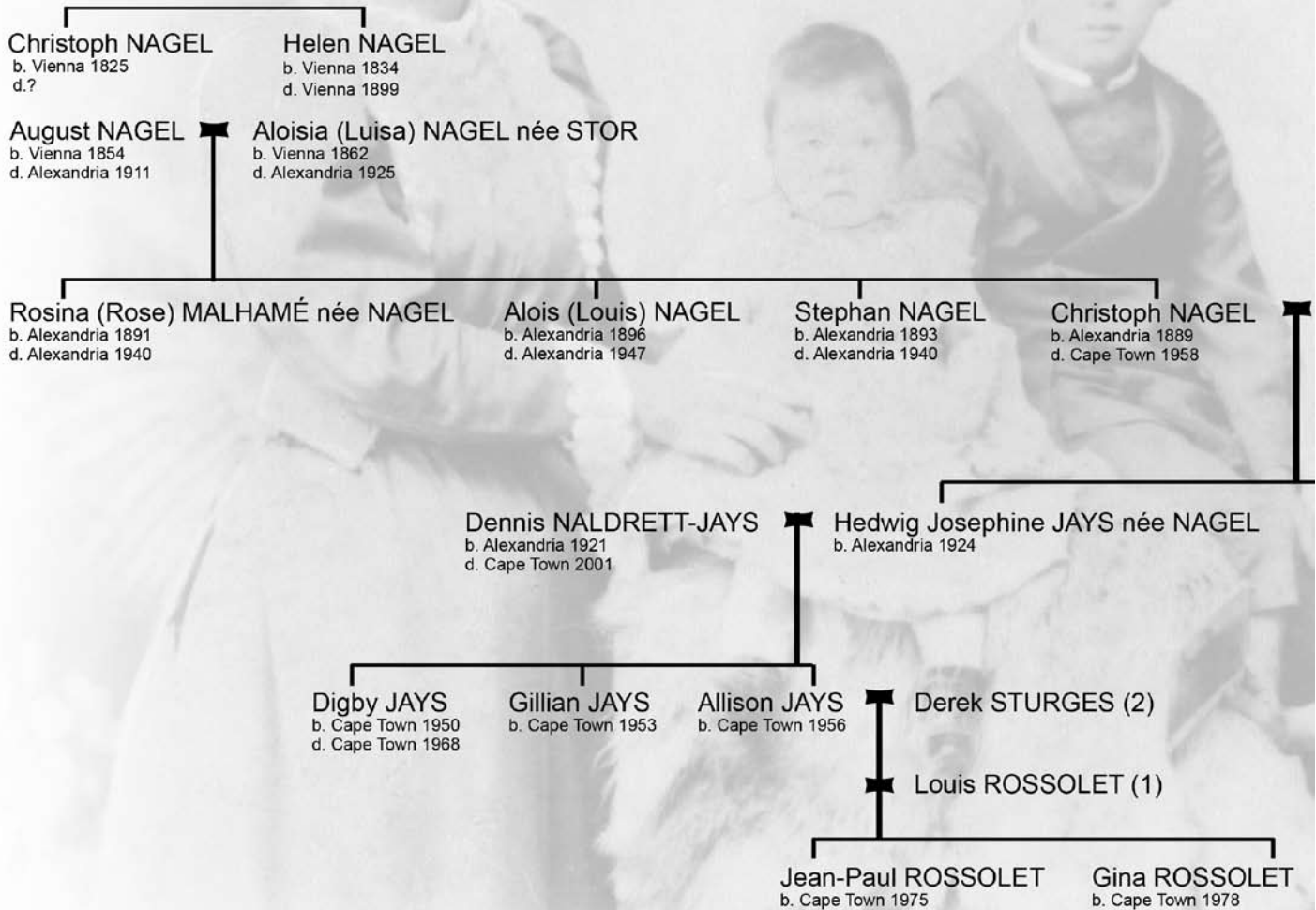
5 The influential Menasce family were originally Sephardic Jews from Morocco, who immigrated to Egypt during the eighteenth century. Jacob Levi Menasce (1807–1882) started as a money changer (*serraf*) in Cairo, and eventually became a prominent banker with branches in Cairo, Alexandria, Marseille, Liverpool, London and Manchester. In 1876, he was given Hungarian nationality and made baron by Emperor Franz Joseph. He moved to Alexandria in 1876, and his son Bekhor, and grandsons Jacques and Felix became each in turn the head of the Jewish community in Alexandria. They were known in the city for their philanthropy. <http://74.52.200.226/~sefarad/lm/016/page18.html> ; <http://www.answers.com/topic/de-menasce-family>

6 Rudolf Agstner, *Op. Cit.* p.323.

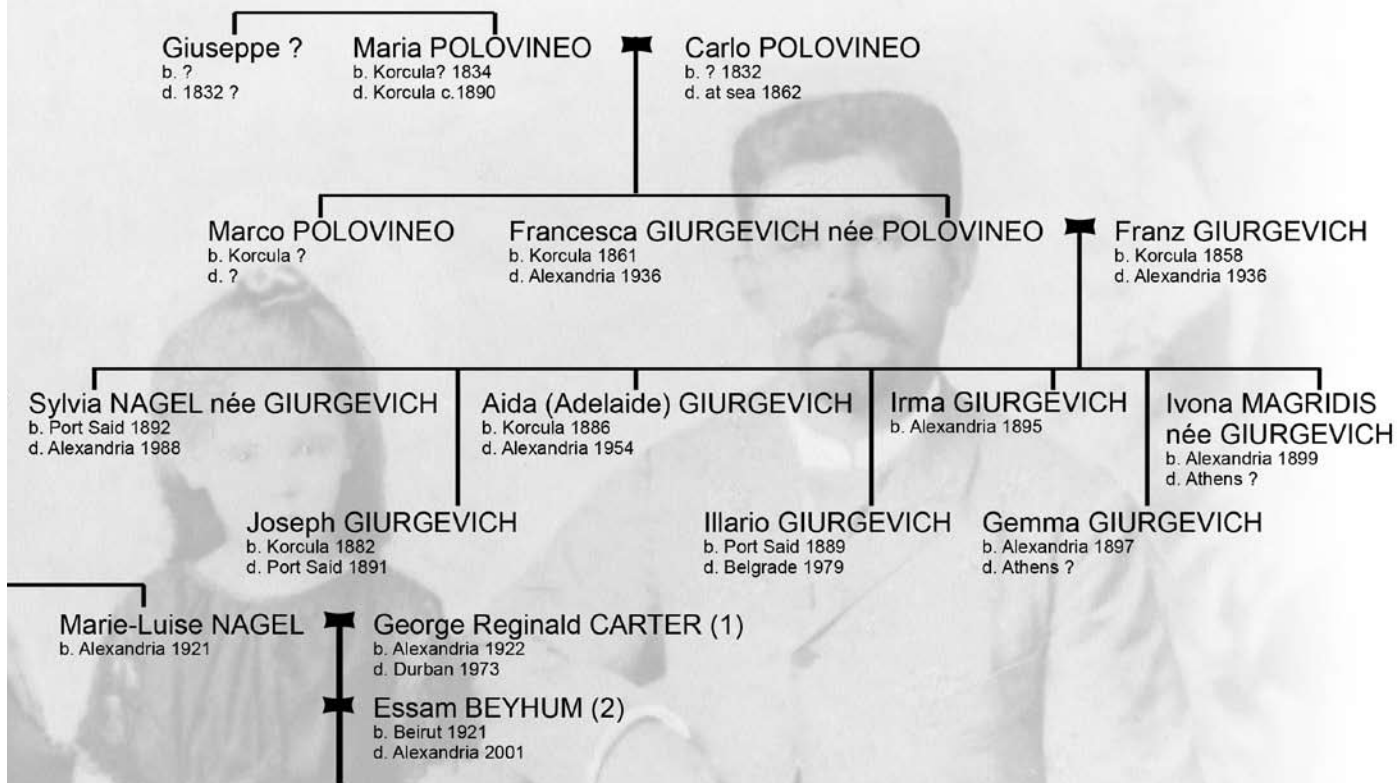
7 See for example: Adrian R. J. Kerr, *Ancient Egypt and Us: The Impact of Ancient Egypt on the Modern World*, Ferniehurst Publishing, 2009, p.50; Dorothée Guillot, *Histoire de la Pharmacie. La Momie: De sa confection à son utilisation*. 2005. <http://www.ordre.pharmacien.fr/upload/Synthese/191.pdf>

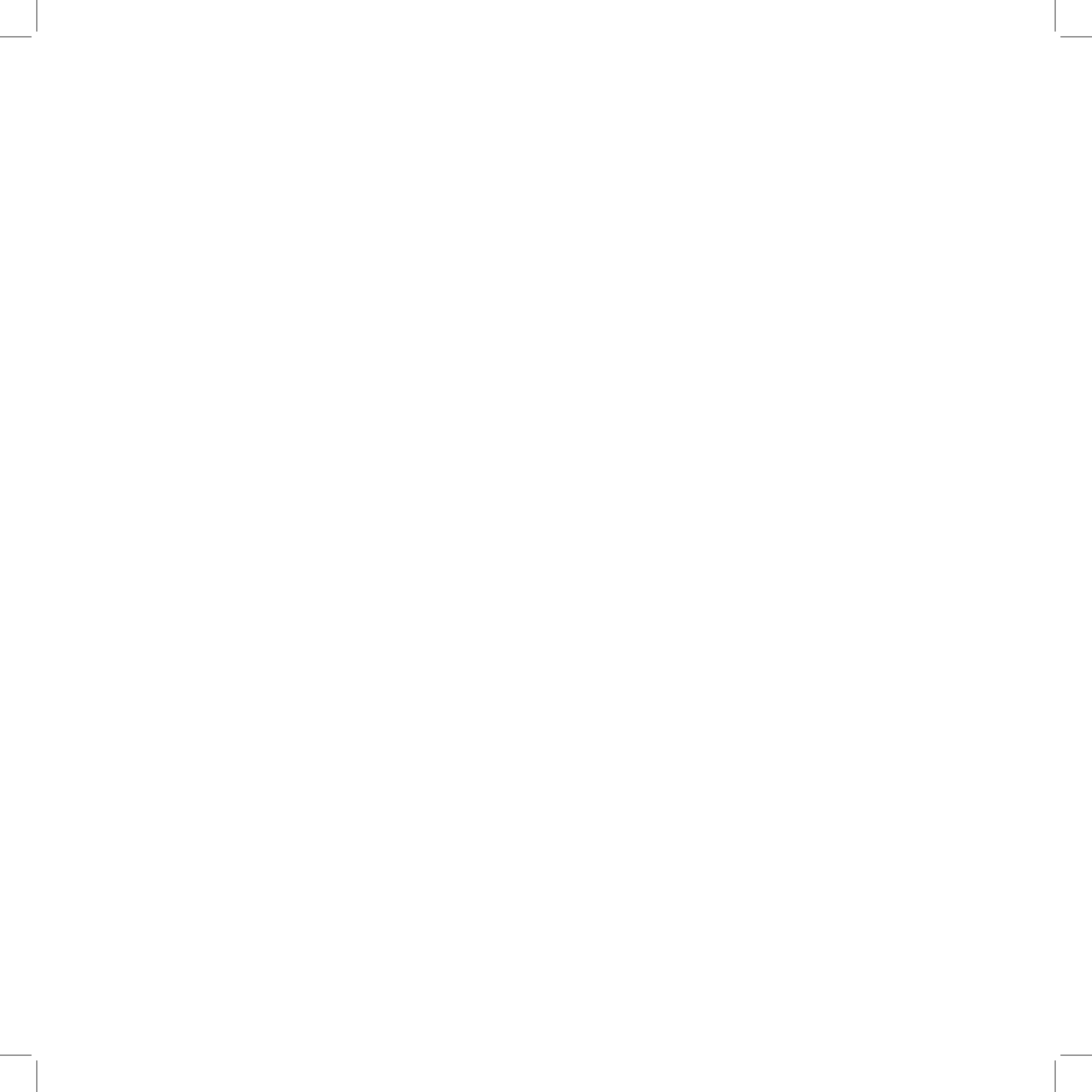
8 Rudolf Agstner , *Op. Cit.* pp. 317–318.

NAGEL FAMILY TREE



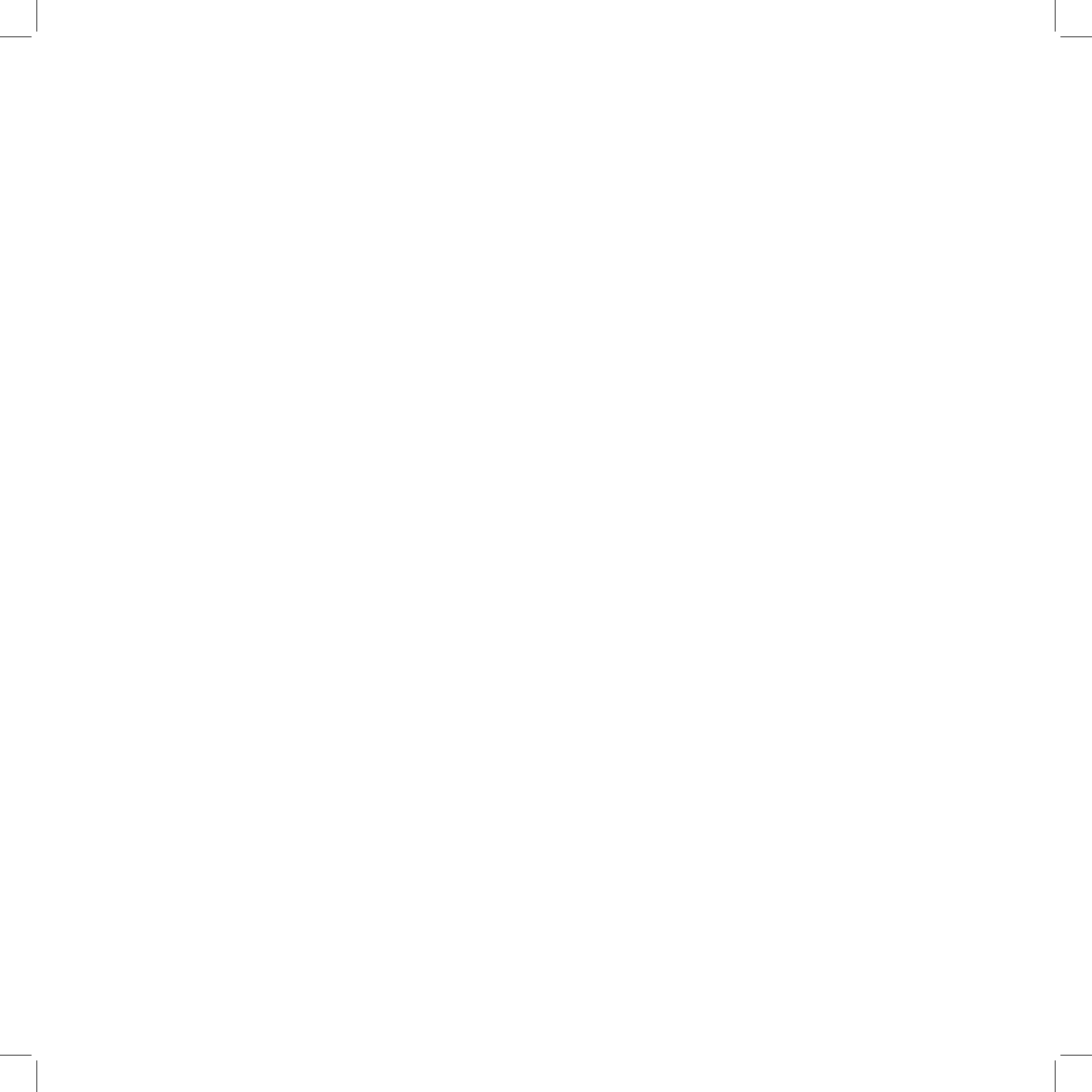
GIURGEVICH FAMILY TREE





PART ONE

From Dalmatia and Vienna to Alexandria



CHAPTER 1

Childhood in Alexandria

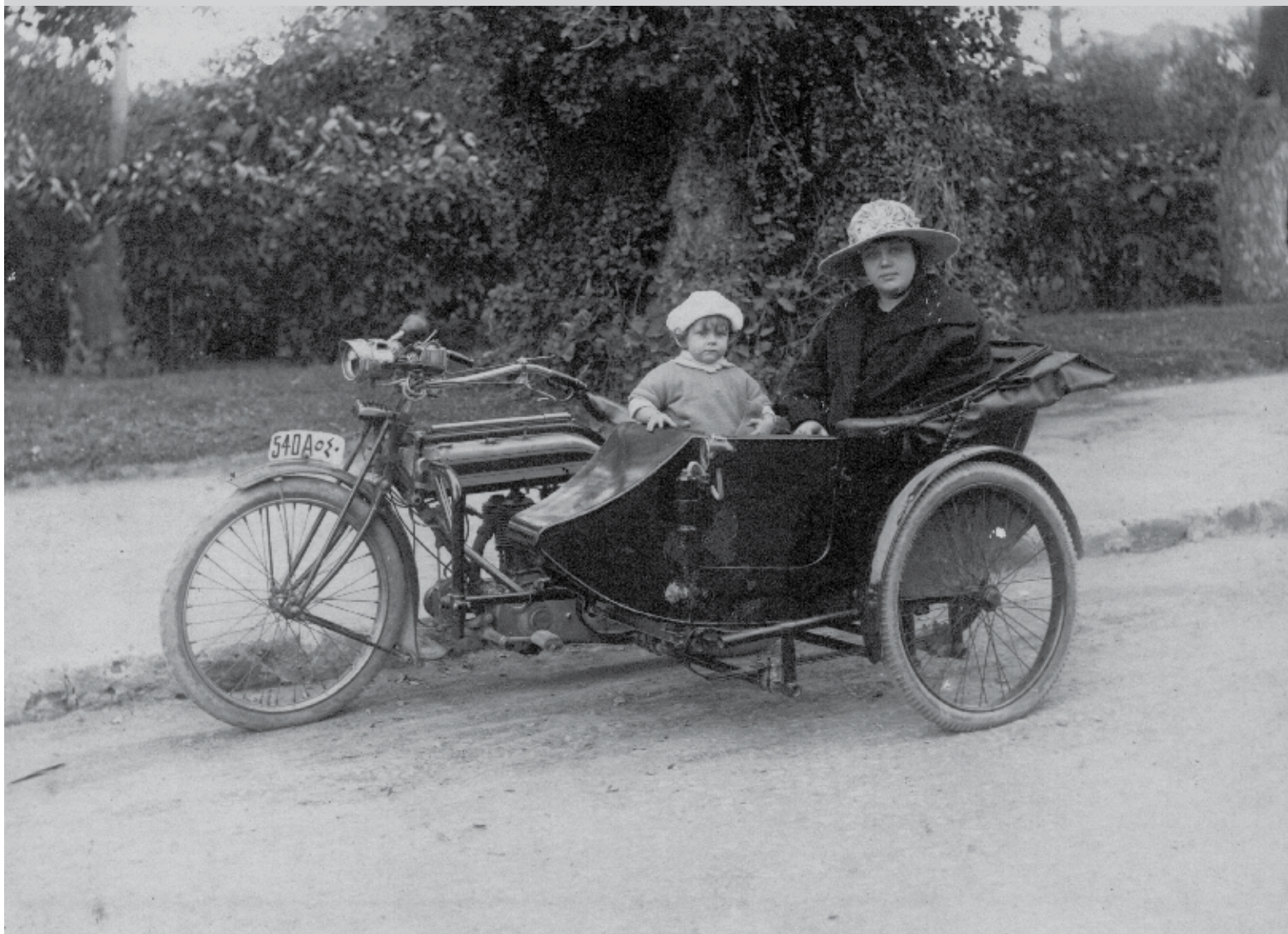
“Marie-Luise, Marie-Luise, come quick! Daddy has a surprise for you!”

Sylvia was very excited. She spoke very quickly as was her custom. She spoke Italian with her daughter, for Sylvia's mother tongue was Italian. Marie-Luise was already three and played with dolls. She had a doll's house that her father made for her, with lots of tiny furniture in it. When she played with it, she would forget the world around her and be fully absorbed in her own little world. But now, as her mother spoke to her so abruptly, she became alert. Father was planning something and so she was all attention. She fidgeted as Sylvia changed her daughter's dress and placed a hat upon her head. Her mother was already dressed, as elegant as ever. At last Marie-Luise was ready. Sylvia donned her hat and pulled on her gloves. Together, they walked downstairs and out into the street where a

very strange vehicle awaited. Marie-Luise had never seen the like of it before! Her mother got in on one side, while her father lifted Marie-Luise over the other side. She settled onto her mother's lap. Her father stood in front of the vehicle and turned a crank. A strange noise was heard and then the engine started. He too climbed in, having donned a special cap which she had never seen on him before. Now the motorcycle with the sidecar began moving. They drove slowly along the street. After a few turns they were on the Corniche, the wide street that runs along the seafront. As they passed, people turned their heads and stared. It was a rare sight in Alexandria. It was still 1924 and there were not many motorized vehicles. They drove past many beautiful buildings, with occasional stretches of open desert in between. Then came a beach, but it was empty. It was already too cold for swimming.

Marie-Luise was very excited. She ceaselessly asked questions and wondered at everything she saw. For her it was a pleasant feeling to glide along so fast. Then her father stopped at a point directly under a few palm trees. He pulled out his camera, for he was an enthusiastic photographer and had to take a photo of this first excursion with the new motorcycle. Marie-Luise waited impatiently for the journey to resume. They drove along the Corniche and in response to her request, her father turned around one more time and drove the whole distance again. Then they drove back home. "That was wonderful!" sighed Marie-Luise. She could have driven on forever.

They made many excursions with this vehicle which was now her father's pride and joy. He even took Marie-Luise in it to the French kindergarten. Marie-Luise was very proud of her Daddy and the other children envied her. Sometimes another child was allowed to ride along, and that was always a major event.



Sylvia Nagel with her daughter, Marie-Luise, in a motorcycle with sidecar along the Corniche, 1923

The Corniche was mostly empty. There were only carriages and a few scattered cars. The tram lay a few hundred meters away from the Corniche and was the means of transportation for most people. Marie-Luise loved to ride the tram, but to ride with Daddy in the motorcycle, that was the best of all!

That same year, Marie-Luise got a little sister, Hedwig Josephine. Of course, she wanted to play with the little one instantly, but that had to wait a bit. Mummy explained to her that the baby was still too small, but that when Hedwig grew a bit, the two would play together. Hedwig was light blond and a pretty little girl. She was Daddy's favorite, or so Marie-Luise thought.

At first the children went to a French school and thus French became the girls' first language, the language in which they learned to read and write. At home they spoke Italian. There was a Greek nanny and at times a Greek cook too. Next door lived Greek neighbors. Thus, as a matter of course the children learned Greek also. As for Arabic, the language of the Egyptians, they learned it only from the servants, for there were no Egyptians in their immediate vicinity. One met them only in the market or maybe as workers, but there was no contact with them. This was the case for most Europeans at the time, and the Egyptians were hardly acknowledged. For the Europeans there was even a separate jurisdiction. Alexandria was a city dominated by Europeans; there were many nationalities intermingling, and thus the shops, too, buzzed with European tongues. One heard French, Italian and Greek, while Arabic was spoken only rarely. The shop assistants often spoke more than one language.

Marie-Luise's childhood was very carefree and happy. Although the economic crisis wreaked havoc in the rest of the world, Egypt had a relatively healthy economy.

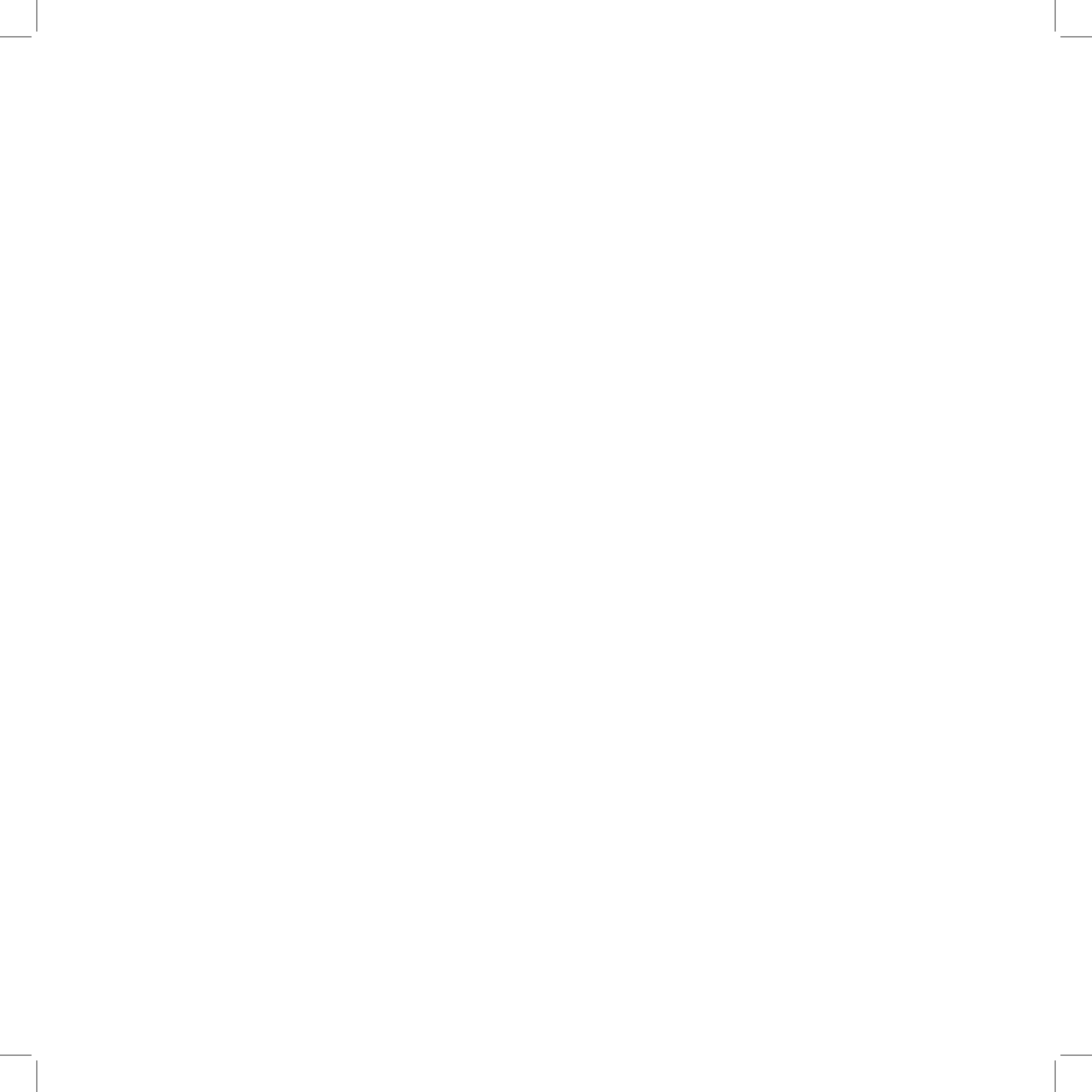
The girls spent their schooldays at the French school until Marie-Luise was twelve. Their father perceived himself as an Austrian, or as a German, and wanted his children to learn perfect German. In Alexandria there was a German girls' school run by a Catholic order of nuns, the Borromäerinnen. The girls were enrolled there, but how was one to master German in such a short period of time? However their father had a solution for even that: a boarding school was attached to the school, so the girls were housed there for a year.

Now they were day and night in the new environment; they heard and spoke only German. However, there were many nationalities at the school, and some of the girls spoke a mixture of several languages. The nuns had a simple recipe for that: even in the break time it was only allowed to speak German. If a child was caught speaking another language, she was punished. She had to do some extra work, mostly to write something in German. Thus they all tried hard to abide by this regulation.

Marie-Luise's family were all Catholics, and when the girls were living in the boarding school they had to attend Catholic mass every morning. They had to wake up before six and then go to the little chapel for the service. When praying they had to kneel. That was their daily routine.

Childhood in Alexandria, could anything be nicer than that? Everyone who had the privilege to experience this still dreams about it to this day.

But how did the family of Marie-Luise Nagel happen to come to Alexandria? In the following chapters, the story of her ancestors is told.



CHAPTER 2

The Lady from Dalmatia

Korcula Island, Dalmatia, 1864

The country of Dalmatia has a rich history. It lies on the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and belonged for a long period of time to Venice where the people spoke Italian. Dalmatia became part of the Austrian Empire in 1815. Then in 1867 the Austro-Hungarian Empire was created and Dalmatia was a part of this great multi-ethnic empire. Today, it is in Croatia.

There is an island there, Korcula, with a city of the same name. The city is small and the houses were built close to each other. In this small city lived the family whose story we will tell here.

Carlo Polovineo was a mariner and the first officer on a steamer of the Austrian Lloyd which conducted trade in the Mediterranean Sea. The goods came from all over Europe and were transported through the port of Trieste to Alexandria, as well as to Tunis and other North African ports. They brought back goods from Africa and spices that the caravans brought from Arabia. The journey usually took several weeks and one never knew when the ship would return.

Carlo's wife, Maria, always stayed behind alone with the children, Francesca and Marco. She lived with her mother and would have been satisfied with her fate. Many women lived like that, often alone, awaiting the return of their husbands. It was a rather unreal life, in which everything was crammed into the few weeks when the man was at last present. The children hardly knew their father. For them he remained the stranger who sailed in for a short period of time and then disappeared again. Her mother, in contrast, was always there, and everything revolved around her. She was the focal point of the family.

Maria was often very unhappy. She hated the lethargy that sometimes took hold of her during those long weeks alone. She then had to force herself to do her duty by the children and the small household. It was difficult for her to get up even, and were it not for the children would have surrendered even more to melancholy. Why could she not accompany her husband? But that was absolutely impossible. Women did not belong on board ship. Every time Maria discussed how she felt with her mother a fight erupted: "Be grateful that you have a good man. Doesn't he do all this for you? You should be glad you have your children and a nice home. What more do you want?" But Maria could not stop thinking about how she might change her life. She had been to school and learned languages. Imagine what she could do with that! But with a family and small children she felt trapped in her environment, in her life.

One day, Maria had been waiting again for weeks for the return of the ship on which her husband Carlo was traveling. The ship was supposed to return in September. But it was already mid October and there was still no news. Day after day she ran down the narrow stairs to the port and spoke to the incoming sailors to discover whether anyone had heard anything. At last, she learned that the ship, the *Passaglia*, had been sighted in Trieste. It would not be long now!

Indeed, the ship reached the port. Maria stood expectantly on the quay. She saw the sailors and the officers disembarking. But Carlo was not amongst them. Then the captain disembarked last. He headed towards her, and suddenly Maria had a premonition of something very bad.

“Ma’am. I’m afraid I have some very sad news for you. Your husband passed away a few weeks ago due to illness. He suddenly ran a very high fever and there was nothing we could do to help him. He lived for two more days and then passed away. We buried him at sea and are all very sorry. In the name of the crew and the shipping company, allow me to extend my heartfelt condolences.”

Maria was petrified. She just stood there, unable to move. When the captain put a hand on her shoulder, she came to life and stared at him. Meanwhile, a number of the men who were on board the ship had joined the group. Together with their wives, they took Maria in their midst. They supported her because suddenly her knees gave way. They took her home, where the two young children were waiting with their grandmother for their father. The three-year-old Francesca did not yet understand what had happened, but her brother Marco, who was five, grasped the situation. Together with their grandmother the children sat in the room and Marco shed silent tears.

The neighbors and friends flocked in to pay their condolences and offer help. In Korcula everyone knew one another, especially the families of the men who went to sea. They were a close community which shared their joys and their grief.

Days and nights went by. Maria was unable to sleep and was always startled, thinking that Carlo was coming. He must come, she thought to herself. But when she awoke, she instantly remembered that he would never return. However, her life had to go on. The children needed her and she tried to be there for them. She did not answer their questions about their father very accurately, but the children were used to the fact that their father was often absent for long stretches of time. After a few weeks, when she was able to think clearly again, she began to think of her future. How was she to cover their expenses? She received help from all sides, but people were not rich. And there was no pension paid by the shipping company. At some point she would have to fend for herself again.

She still received many visitors. All her acquaintances came to pay their condolences. One of those visitors would imprint herself on her memory. Mrs. Giurgevich was a woman whom she originally knew only from church. She came with her little boy Franz to pay a visit. The children played happily together. Franz played particularly nicely with little Francesca, for he seemed to be utterly infatuated with her. On the way home, Franz talked to his mother who explained to him that the children's father would never come home again and Franz burst into tears. But he had an idea. Enthusiastically he explained to his mother: "You know, when I grow up, I'll marry Francesca!" Though the mother was astounded at this pledge, she soon forgot all about it. But Franz never forgot it!

A few weeks later, Maria's brother Giuseppe returned to Korcula. He had been away for weeks in a coach visiting half of Europe, for he was a merchant. Sometimes he traveled

as far as Russia where he sold the merchandise that the traders brought to Korcula by ship. Giuseppe did not know anything about the death of her husband yet. But when he stepped into the house, he immediately sensed that something was wrong. "Where is Carlo? Is he still at sea?" was his first question. His sister gave him an endlessly grieving look and started weeping while she told of the tragedy that had befallen them. Giuseppe tried to comfort her, but he knew that Maria now had great worries about her future.

A few days later they finally discussed the matter. Giuseppe was keen on helping out and already had an idea how to do it.

"You are so talented, know several languages and are well read in history and such things. I'd imagine that you could become lady-in-waiting to the empress at the Russian czar's court! The empress is German and selects the governesses for her children very carefully, and always wants to be surrounded with ladies with whom she can have interesting conversations. What do you think? On my next journey I will talk to her and will suggest that she takes you as a lady-in-waiting!"

"Do you really think I can do that? I'm no teacher. And besides, I would have to move far away. I would have to leave our mother, relatives and friends all behind. It would be hard for the children too. I don't think that is a solution for me."

But her brother was relentless. He tried to persuade her.

"Of course you can. What a question! Why are you afraid to go to a foreign country? Look, I used to be afraid, too. But you know how father persuaded me that at times one has to be daring. What is it he used to say? If all the people were careful, we would still be

living in trees today. Besides, think about it. What possibilities do you have here? You could certainly marry Otto, or any other one of those men who give you those longing looks."

"Oh no, not that. I don't like any of them. I truly loved Carlo, you know that. I don't want to get married again! My children are now the most important thing to me."

Giuseppe tried again: "Just think about it. You see, the empress has commissioned me to find someone. I had originally thought of fat Emma. She's not unintelligent and I'm sure she'll find her way about there."

Now that was too much for Maria. "What? That dumb woman? She can't even add one and one together! You'd really embarrass yourself there. The empress would think that we are all as simple minded as her."

Suddenly Maria was very quiet. A few minutes later she said, "Do you think our father would have agreed to this? That I take the children and travel away from here? What do you think?"

Giuseppe was now all for it, "But of course. He always supported the idea that you too should do something for yourself other than the traditional chores of women. He even sent you to the nuns so that you'd learn languages. He would certainly be in support of your going."

After many conversations with her brother, Maria at last was convinced that this might indeed be a good idea. And the children, too, would be taken care of. They would grow up with the czar's children and she would always have them close.

Giuseppe asked Maria for documents and listed all her talents and gifts, and took them with him on his next journey. Soon he was on his way to Saint Petersburg again and Maria now waited impatiently for his return.

Meanwhile she prepared for her journey. She spoke to her mother who was still unaware of her plans. She talked to her friends and neighbors. Some of them were rather concerned, but there were also those who were in support. Maybe they also envied Maria for the prospect of starting a totally new life?

About six weeks later her brother returned. As he greeted her, he immediately told her his good news. He had managed to speak with the empress and she had agreed to take Maria as a lady-in-waiting at her court. He had even bargained for a proper income for Maria. She would live with her children in the palace where she would be provided for. Maria was ecstatic and looked forward to the new beginning. Her brother would accompany her on the long journey.

When Maria had settled everything in her home and finished packing, she took her leave from Korcula, from her mother and all her relatives and friends. They first had to travel by boat to the mainland, and then they traveled on by coach. Giuseppe had taken care of everything, and had even announced their arrival everywhere along the way. Hence even the accommodation had been prepared in the inns.

During the short passage to the mainland Maria thought of her husband who was buried at sea and shed a few tears in memory of him. With slight anxiety she thought of all the new things that she was going to face. Had she taken enough warm clothes for herself and the

children? The winter in Russia was very cold. No doubt she would miss the mild climate of Korcula. But that was all futile now.

They climbed into the coach, and together with her children and brother she traveled into her new future.

The journey to Saint Petersburg was long and uncomfortable. It was May and at times it rained heavily. The coach was covered, but the roads were often sodden. At times the coach got stuck, and they all had to give a helping hand to pull it out of the mire. Often they arrived totally exhausted in the next accommodation, and simply fell into bed. The children found the journey at first very exciting, but soon they felt bored and Maria and Giuseppe tried to keep them in a good mood with songs and games. Francesca kept asking, "Are we there yet?" And her brother would reply, "No, not yet! Stop asking so often. It will still take many days and nights."

Once an axle broke and they were held up for many hours. The coachman called for help in the next village and the coach was repaired. More than four weeks later they at last arrived in Saint Petersburg. Maria was already fascinated from afar with the great city and its many towers. She had never seen the likes of it before. Everything looked so different from home, and she felt a bit heavy hearted.

Giuseppe asked the coachman to stop at the back entrance and went in first to announce her arrival. As soon as the empress heard of this, she rushed out personally to welcome the family. Even the younger children of the czar's family came running out with her, and it was only a few minutes before the children were friends. The family was then escorted to their lodgings. Maria was astounded at the huge chambers and was excited



Maria Polovineo, lady-in-waiting
at the Russian court, Saint
Petersburg, 1863

that they had so much space. And Giuseppe, too, was taken care of. He would remain with them for a few days before he devoted himself again to his business in Saint Petersburg and then returned home. Maria hurried to write a detailed letter to her mother.

At that time Czar Alexander II ruled Russia. In 1841, he had married Princess Marie von Hessen-Darmstadt in Germany. They had eight children, born in the years 1842 to 1860. The empress preferred to have ladies who spoke several languages in her court, and Maria mastered German and French in addition to Italian. That is why the empress had immediately approved when Giuseppe suggested introducing his sister into her court.

Maria was warmly welcomed. Her children, Marco and Francesca, were to grow up with the children of the czar. Maria taught the children various languages, but with the empress she usually spoke German, at least when they were alone. It was the empress' mother tongue.

At first Maria suffered due to the rough weather and the darkness in winter. She was used to the mild Mediterranean weather of Dalmatia, and it was difficult for her to acclimatize herself. The children, however, immediately felt at home. Together with the three younger children of the czar they ran along the long corridors and played together in the huge chambers of the palace. The servants were used to this and let them have their way. Only when the empress or czar appeared were the children quickly brought under control. For the little family from Korcula it was a carefree life, and Maria enjoyed it to the full.

She was scarcely conscious of the political turmoil of the times. The empress did not talk to her about this and the people around her spoke Russian, which she didn't understand.

Only gradually did she learn Russian, and the empress found a tutor for her who taught her regularly. He also taught the children Russian, as well as other subjects.

The czar's family mostly spent their summers on the country estate. Maria and the children joined the royal family there too, and they all enjoyed the short warm summer. Country parties and picnics were on the program, swimming in the lake, and the growing children all had to learn how to ride horses. This was part of a good upbringing. Francesca soon learned to ride well in a lady's saddle of course. She found that stupid, and would rather have ridden astride the saddle like the boys, but that was not acceptable for ladies. So she did what was expected of her.

Thus the years passed and Francesca turned eighteen, while Marco was twenty. Giuseppe visited his sister in Saint Petersburg as often as his journeys took him there. He always brought letters from home and took back Maria's letters. This way the loved ones in Korcula always knew that Maria and her children were doing fine.

On one such visit, Giuseppe conveyed the news of their mother's death. Maria was very sad, for she had now been away from home for so long, and would have loved to see her mother one more time. Afterwards Maria talked for a long time with her children and they held a family council. Together they agreed to return to Korcula. The empress, however, was not in the least pleased with this decision. She had found in Maria a genuine friend and did not want to lose her. She had come to dote on the children and they could have a good future in Russia, too. But Maria was determined: she wanted to go home.

Again it was Giuseppe who prepared for the journey with the small family. They traveled in several coaches, for with time Maria had come to possess many things she wanted to take

back with her. In the summer they traveled back through many towns that they had seen on the first journey. Giuseppe knew the way well for he had made the journey so often and once again all went well. Once there was a small incident, when they lost a wheel and the coach suddenly jolted to a standstill. But nothing happened and they were all untouched. The coachman, with the help of the men, managed to repair the coach and a few hours later they were on their way again. They always spent the nights in inns that lay along the road. Giuseppe knew all the inns and knew exactly which ones were a good place to stay in. A few weeks later the journey was about to end and they were all very excited. They at last made their way to the island of Korcula by ship. They were home!

CHAPTER 3

The Midwife from Vienna

The ancestors of the Nagel family were originally from Elsass-Lothringen. They were Germans. When the country fell to France during the eighteenth century, the family wanted to remain German. The Empress of Austria, Maria Theresa, was married to Prince Stephan of Elsass-Lothringen. He entreated his wife to receive his German countrymen in Austria. Thus the Nagel family immigrated to Austria with many other families. But how did this family come to Alexandria? This is a very long story, and it begins with a young woman in Vienna....

Helene Nagel was born in Vienna in 1834. She grew up in Vienna, the youngest of five siblings. Her father was a merchant and so were her brothers. The family was very open minded and they traveled a lot because of their work. Helene went to school, and even back then it was noticed that she was very talented. She was interested in natural history, biology and mathematics. These were not exactly subjects that appealed to girls at that time. She was also different from her classmates in other ways. At the lyceum for girls these

subjects were not taught at all; therefore her father provided her with a private tutor. When she finished school, she wanted to study medicine, but this was not a possibility for girls at that time. Not only in Austria, but all over the world, too, university remained inaccessible for yet some time. We know, for instance, that Bridget Adams studied medicine in Leipzig in 1876 and became the first gynecologist in Munich. It is also known that there were trained midwives in America.

Helene, then, was determined to become a midwife. She visited all the midwives whom she could trace and talked to them. One midwife in particular appealed to her for she seemed more advanced than the rest. She befriended her and soon accompanied the experienced woman on house visits. She learned from her and meticulously observed what happened during delivery. This depended on inspiring the women with calmness and confidence: one should not tell them about the dangers that might arise during a delivery. Sometimes they discussed things for a long period of time, because Helene had observed something very strange: the mothers who gave birth for the first time didn't seem to have any idea of what they were about to experience. They were just afraid that something might happen. In almost every family there were stories of mothers who died during childbirth or of stillborn babies. The whole thing seemed to be a dangerous matter. Helene observed all this and decided to create better conditions for mothers and children. Why, for instance, should young women not know what to expect during the delivery? This was kept a great secret. No one told these women how they should behave. They were forbidden to do any exercise during their pregnancy, indeed they were strongly advised to move as little as possible. It would, however, have been advantageous if every mother kept herself fit for the time when she would have to make the strenuous effort needed to give birth. That was what preoccupied Helene and she decided that in the future she would do everything very differently.

Against her parents' will, Helene succeeded in enrolling at the maternity clinic and being trained as a midwife. At first, all were quite impressed that Helene would become a midwife or at least they accepted this. But then she explained to her father that she had to learn more about anatomy and the processes related to delivery. Women were not allowed to attend university, yet Helene remained obstinate. She found out that there was indeed training for midwives and thus went to study at the Midwifery School in Vienna.

At that time, there were two adjacent maternity clinics in Vienna. At one, midwives were trained and the mothers who delivered their babies there were usually women of rather poor circumstances. Some had no family and were not married. The other maternity clinic served for the training of physicians who assisted delivery. Strangely enough, the mortality rate of mothers at the clinic for physicians was far higher than at the midwives' clinic.

The physician Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis accidentally discovered that childbed fever was transmitted by the physicians themselves because they also dissected corpses and sometimes went directly from an autopsy to the delivery. One of his colleagues had contracted an infection and it was discovered that he had infected himself with an autopsy scalpel. The disease which eventually caused his death was the same that befell the mothers, the so-called childbed fever. Semmelweis insisted that the physicians wash their hands with chlorine. The success was amazing, for the cases of childbed fever dropped dramatically from 18% to 2.5%. One then also understood why the mortality rate at the maternity clinic was so much lower: the midwives had nothing to do with corpses and the physicians at that clinic did not go into the autopsy hall. The results of these studies were published as early as 1847 and Ignaz Semmelweis gave a presentation on this topic in 1850. Unfortunately it took further decades before his views on the causes of childbed fever became established. Semmelweis' colleagues and even his superior became antagonistic.

This battle for acknowledgment of his theory wore him down. He asked for a transfer to Hungary and in Budapest was promoted to professor. In 1865, Semmelweis was diagnosed with a mental disease and admitted to an asylum. Had he really gone mad? Semmelweis died of septicemia. The disease was the very same one that caused childbed fever. What an irony of fate! Through his insight Semmelweis saved the lives of millions of women, yet he blamed himself harshly for the women who got infected through him before he discovered his theory. He once stated, "Consequential upon my conviction I must herewith admit, that only God knows the number of those who went prematurely to their graves because of me."

During her studies, Helene got to know Dr. Semmelweis and respected him greatly. She was fully convinced that his theory was valid. From then onwards, hygiene became part of their daily routine in dealing with their patients.

At last, Helene sat for her final exams and received a diploma that licensed her as a trained midwife. At the same time, she assisted for years in home deliveries. Through her education she was now able to explain in medical terms the practical advice she had received. At times she discovered even that some of it was but superstition. She soon became renowned in Vienna and was often called for deliveries in well-off families. She still went to the maternity clinic of the midwives, for she wanted to acquire as much experience as possible.

Vienna 1858

One day Helene came home with great news: the university was going to organize a sightseeing trip from Vienna to Cairo! That was something totally unusual. The journey would be long. One traveled by train from Vienna to Trieste and then with the Austrian Lloyd steamer to Alexandria. The whole journey to Alexandria lasted six days. From there the trip continued by train to Cairo, where the pyramids and the city was to be visited, and then the return journey would begin from Cairo along the same route.

An educational journey! Helene's parents were appalled. They could not approve of such a long journey with a group of young men. Helene would be the only woman: how could she envisage that?

Ever since her childhood, Helene had had a burning interest for Egypt so she really wanted to take part in the trip. Her parents were against her going. The journey was too dangerous and it would be inappropriate for a single woman to travel with so many men. But when was Helene ever influenced by what was appropriate and what not? For instance, she often wore long trousers instead of the overly long dresses or skirts. She found trousers far more comfortable, especially because she often went on foot to visit the young mothers. One could move more easily in them because the streets were often dirty and uneven.

After Helene had set her mind on making the journey, it was just a matter of time before she persuaded her parents. She was very excited about it and at last seeing the pyramids!

Finally, it was time to leave and the group—there were over thirty of them—set out for Egypt.

The new railway carried the young people from Vienna to Trieste. From there they took the Austrian Lloyd steamer to Alexandria. Helene had a tiny cabin all to herself. She was on deck most of the time and enjoyed the voyage. When they arrived in Alexandria she was fascinated by the strange surroundings. The noisy hurly-burly of the port was confusing. Egypt, too, had a new railway, and the group traveled to Cairo by train. And there Helene met her fate.

Cairo 1858

After the long passage from Trieste to Alexandria and then the train journey to Cairo, the group at last arrived in the Egyptian capital. Two days later, Helene could simply not wait for the group and set off by coach on her own. As she walked by herself near the pyramids, she wondered at the grand complex which looked even more impressive close-up than in the pictures that she had seen in Vienna. She was often addressed by Egyptians who wanted to offer her help. No one understood what this well-dressed lady actually wanted there. And alone, too!

The members of her group were still asleep when she left the hotel, for the previous day had been strenuous. They had visited the mosques and made a great tour of the city. It had all been organized by coach. In the evening there was a gala with a grand banquet. It cost Helene great effort to stay alert until the end when she finally excused herself. She had slept

well and now at last she had arrived at the pyramids, the ambition of her dreams! In fact, she wanted above all to go alone, but a particularly stubborn guide followed hard on her heels. He explained the complex to her in French. She probably knew more than him, but she let him talk while her thoughts wandered, observing her surroundings intensely. She saw the majestic outline of the pyramids and wondered at how colossal they were close-up. It was all so much more impressive than in the pictures. She walked about as if she knew everything, for that was how accurately she remembered the layout of the complex.

After a while she reached the great pyramid from the sphinx. There stood a group of people talking in German. At a distance Helene recognized that it was her own group from Vienna. She passed by them from afar, not wanting to be spoken to. But they didn't even notice her because they were so absorbed in the explanations offered by their guide. When she had already passed them by, she noticed a man from the group following her slowly. She observed him without turning around. He was a tall young man with black curly hair. After walking around the second smaller pyramid, he approached her and spoke to her. Now she recognized him. She had already seen him at the university in Vienna. They started a conversation. It was the first time for her to see him close-up. Of course he knew her too and it seemed that he had noticed her for a long time.

"We know each other, don't we? We are traveling with the same group. You're Fräulein Nagel, the famous midwife from Vienna, aren't you?"

Now Helene was astounded. She had not realized that the group knew exactly who was traveling with them. She had hardly spoken to anyone so far. Evidently, this gentleman was well informed about her.

He introduced himself: "I am Gregor Hayek, a medical student in the tenth semester." Now she told him a bit about herself. He listened carefully and occasionally asked her to explain something. No one had ever listened to her like that before. Suddenly she found herself telling him of her dreams and wishes. Yet who was this man to whom she was pouring out her heart so unguardedly?

The Egyptian guide had excused himself, not without first receiving an adequate reward. Now they were all alone. They had time, for the group from Vienna had already left. He told her about himself. He was Armenian and studying medicine in Vienna, where his family had lived for generations. He, too, was fascinated with the colossal pyramid complex. They decided to visit a few more touristic sights together and wandered about for a long period of time, then took a coach back to the hotel where they took leave from each other. But they wanted to meet again on the following day. Of course they had to participate in the group excursions, but they managed to meet alone every now and then, at times for only a couple of hours. They sat by the Nile and held long conversations. At some point they discussed their future. Suddenly Gregor became very serious. "I must tell you something. I am very ill and I may not live for long. That is why I have traveled to Egypt. It has always been my dream to see all this. I would love to experience here as much as I can for as long as I still can. I may soon not be able to travel anymore."

He explained to her that he was in the terminal stages of tuberculosis. Helene was shocked, saddened and appalled. But at the same time, she was also very determined. At that moment she very spontaneously arrived at a decision. She would stay by him, no matter how. She would marry him. Gregor explained that his family would never permit that.

Armenians never wed outside their community. But he had not counted on Helene Nagel's determination.

The next day their sojourn in Cairo came to an end and the group traveled back to Alexandria. Helene and Gregor decided to spend a few more days there and explore Alexandria. He had relatives there whom he wanted to visit. His relatives were surprised to find Gregor on their doorstep accompanied by a young woman, but when he explained that she was a colleague from Vienna, they became very friendly. They were pleased with the visit, and Helene and Gregor spent wonderful days in Alexandria. They walked along the Corniche and visited the Roman monuments, the Coptic churches and the mosques in the city. Sometimes they sat for a long time by the sea. Helene sent her family a letter explaining the delay of her return.

Ten days later Helene and Gregor traveled again by one of the Austrian Lloyd ships to Trieste, and from there by train back to Vienna. On board the ship, Helene and Gregor often thought together of ways to persuade his family. They stayed in separate cabins of course, yet were eyed suspiciously by their fellow travelers. What kind of couple were they who were not married and yet traveled together?

In Vienna, they disembarked separately. Helene was awaited by her family and they were all happy that she had returned safely. She had written to inform them that she wanted to meet with a number of midwives in Alexandria, but still said nothing about the young man who now preoccupied her every thought.

A few days later she met Gregor and was soon introduced to his family. They were all very friendly with her, but no one spoke of a possible wedding. One day she grabbed the

opportunity to speak alone with Gregor's parents. She told them that she knew of his illness, but wanted to be there for him and to live with him. They all tried to dissuade her. But at some point Gregor's parents, too, discovered what kind of person she was. They only wanted their son to be happy in the short period of time he had left to live. In the end the parents agreed to the marriage.

Only then did Helene speak with her own parents. They discussed her imminent wedding but she did not mention Gregor's illness. She wanted to protect her parents, and yet they were worried about her since they knew that the Armenians were very different from other people in Vienna. They thought that Helene would not feel comfortable in that family. She had to convince her family that he was the only man she would consider marrying. At last, after many a discussion, her parents conceded.

Now Helene began to shop for her trousseau: bed sheets, clothes and dishes. Her mother, who accompanied her most of the time, insisted that Helene must get married with a proper trousseau. For Helene that was relatively unimportant, for she thought only in practical terms. She was not really interested in clothes and at the seamstress gave orders for long coats and trousers, too.

"What do you want with those?" her mother asked her indignantly. But Helene stood her ground. She ordered only a limited number of so-called "appropriate" dresses and a wedding gown. The gown was made according to her taste, but her mother found it too simple.

The final weeks before the wedding flew past quickly: invitations, visits to Gregor's family, all that felt like a dream to her. When she closed her eyes, she saw only Gregor's face in front of her.

The wedding was planned down to the minutest detail. Gregor's family had already prepared a lot. It would be a grand wedding, much greater than Helene had ever imagined. But she gave in for Gregor's sake. She wanted everyone around him to be happy. Before the wedding, Gregor's mother took a look at Helene's wedding gown. She couldn't believe that Helene wanted to get married in such a simple dress. With a sigh she gave in. But it was indeed too simple: it had no luster nor glitter, and the veil also, was too simple. For the sake of peace, Helene gave in and they agreed to add a collar covered in glitter and a new huge veil covered all over with embroidery.

Next for the hairdo. So far, Helene had always done her own hair. Her copper red hair was long and curly, and easily done up actually. For the wedding she had a hairdo that was very fashionable at that time. This time she relented. Helene noticed that she accepted a lot of things for the sake of love that she would normally have rejected.

The wedding was held at the Armenian Church in Vienna. Helene was a beautiful bride and Gregor looked very elegant in his tuxedo. Many tears were shed. The family knew of Gregor's illness and it was a bittersweet moment for them all.

But Helene and Gregor were happy. At first Helene did not want to work, but rather to be with Gregor as much as possible. However, in Vienna she was already known as a good midwife. She was called more and more often for deliveries. Gregor encouraged her to take up these opportunities. "You have to think of later, too. Then you'll be happy to have work

that satisfies and fulfills you." Helene relented and she found herself more and more often on her way with her midwife bag. She wished that she had someone to help her during the deliveries.

A year passed. Gregor's condition was deteriorating. Helene tended him and spent much time by his bedside. Sometimes Gregor's mother relieved her, ordering her to get some rest. In the few hours when Gregor's condition was better, they held hands and tried to relive their fond memories. They imagined that they were again by the pyramids and along the Nile, and that they were walking along the beach in Alexandria and admiring the moon.

Gregor suggested that after his death she should move to Alexandria. There her knowledge would be appreciated and she would certainly have a good life. But Helene would hear nothing of this. She knew that Gregor must die, but she did not yet want to think of the time after. Yet Gregor remained obstinate: "Promise me that you will go to Egypt after I die!" And Helene promised.

Then, far too soon, Gregor's life ran out. At times, he was now unconscious for long periods. A few days later he died. Helene sat by his bed and held his hands, unable to move. After a while his mother came in and closed his eyes.

After the funeral at which Helene seemed to experience everything from a distance, she remained in the flat where she had lived with Gregor. She worked as a midwife, but she could not let go of the thought of moving to Egypt anymore. When she talked to her parents about this, they were shocked. "What do you want to do alone in a foreign land? And you're a woman, too!" No one understood her. She would have loved to move there

where she had been so happy with Gregor, and it was Gregor's wish, too, that she wanted to fulfill. Time and again they held endless discussions where Helene tried persuade her parents. At some point her parents realized that it was futile to attempt to dissuade her. As always, Helene was determined to carry out her decision and started to prepare for her journey. Since she wanted to open a clinic in Alexandria, she bought the most up-to-date equipment and apparatus available in her field. She also took along a lot for her household. A large trunk was soon filled with things that seemed important and indispensable to her.

Finally, everything was bought, packed and stowed in several large trunks. Her siblings, mother and other relatives bade her a tearful farewell. No one knew when she would return. Her father accompanied her by train to Trieste. Helene was very silent on this journey and scarcely answered her father's questions. There was so much that buzzed through her head. Was she doing the right thing? Her father, too, asked her this question. Then he added, "I hope you know that you can always come back home. We will always help you and are always on your side." Helene cried with relief. Only now did she feel really sure and happy about the new beginning.

In Trieste, everything was stowed on board the ship. All her belongings, all her books that she needed for her work, and of course her favorite books from her youth also. Her father took her one last time into his arms. Then he disembarked and they waved for a long time until the ship could no longer be seen.

After five days at sea, Helene arrived in Alexandria. This time the journey was very calm. She spent a lot of time on deck daydreaming. When they caught sight of the Egyptian coast, she did not leave the deck anymore. A few hours later they entered the port. Helene

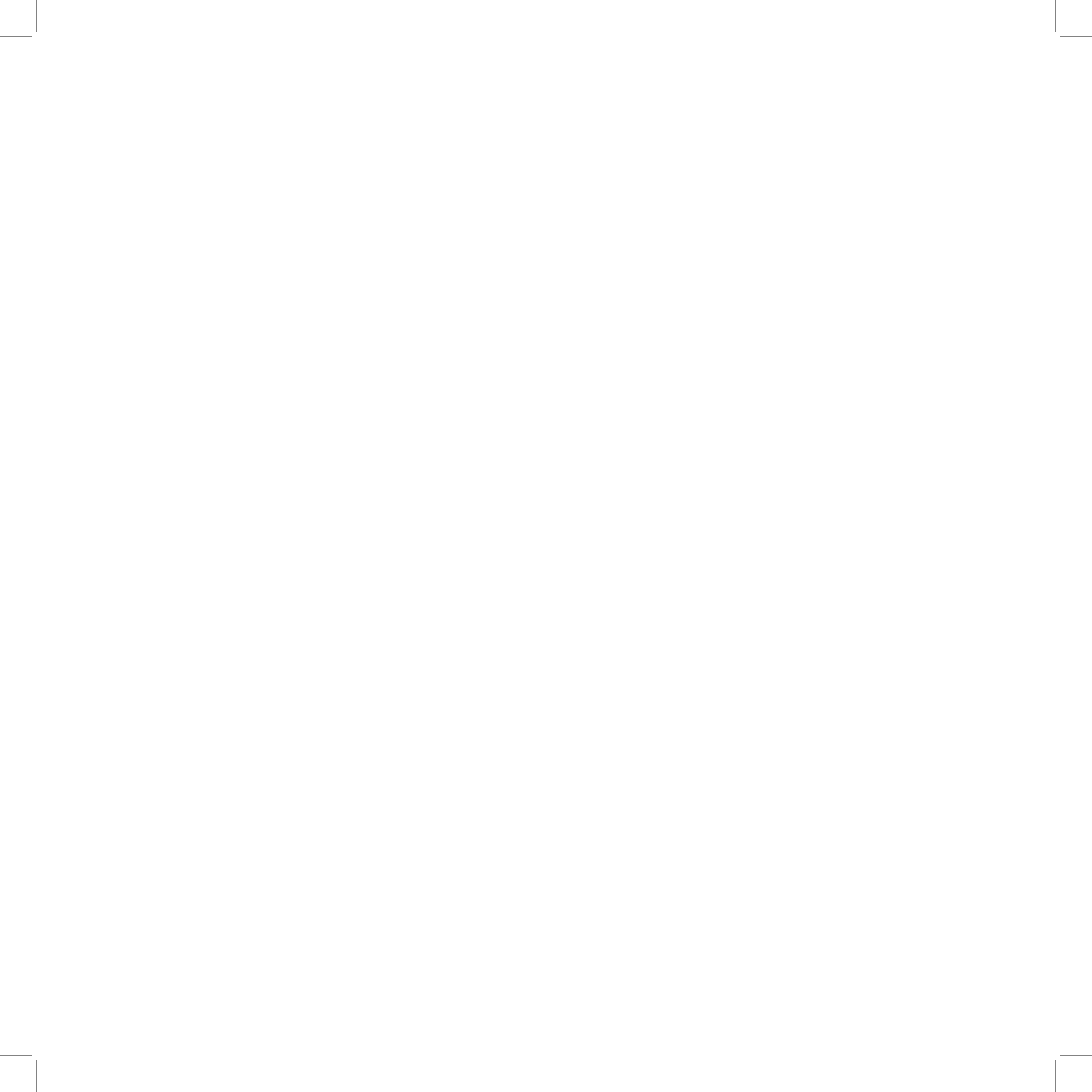
was received by Gregor's relatives. They helped her to find a flat where there was enough space for her midwife's clinic.

Soon she was able to open her clinic. She had brought all the instruments and the birthing chair with her. Very soon she developed an outstanding reputation and was asked to assist in deliveries in the higher social circles. She also tended mothers before and after the delivery. She enlightened the young women. Many of them had no idea whatsoever what to expect at the moment of delivery. In that society they spoke even less about this than in Vienna. Not even mother and daughter spoke about such things. After some time, Helene was even asked for a delivery in the house of the khedive, the ruler of Egypt. This was a decisive turning point in her life. They were very satisfied with her and she received a generous fee. From then on, she was called time and again, and soon she even traveled to Turkey to help there with the deliveries in the royal family. She always received good payment and when a prince was born, especially, she received many gifts. She collected many valuable things such as rugs and jewelry and also received plots of land as gifts and became very, very rich. Yet she remained alone and never remarried. Gregor remained the great love of her life.

After a few years she traveled back to Vienna. It was wonderful to see her parents and siblings once again. They all tried to persuade her to stay in Vienna: "You can practice your profession here too! Here you have your family." But Helene wanted to return to Alexandria. The city where she had been so happy with Gregor meant more to her than her old hometown. In the meantime, she had come to love Egypt, the sea, the desert, the wind. It was a totally different world. So after a few months she returned to Alexandria.

Before she left she had a decisive discussion with her eldest brother, Christoph. His Hungarian wife had died ten years earlier in childbirth. Their son, August, had so far lived with his grandparents. August immediately entered Helene's heart. She suggested to her brother to entrust her with the ten-year-old August: she wanted to take him with her to Egypt and take good care of him. Christoph, at first, did not want to hear of it, but in the end Helene managed to persuade him. "He can enroll in a French school there and you can come and visit us any time. You'll like Alexandria." In the end, he relented.

The journey back was very merry because the boy immediately struck up friendships with a number of other children on board. The other travelers, too, were always happy to see him. He liked to talk with them and could already discuss things quite seriously. Helene proved to be a good mother for him and he was soon calling her "Mama".



CHAPTER 4

August and Luisa

August grew up with Tante Helene. Her household had servants and a cook. August got along well with Helene. Within a short period of time she came to dote on him. Alexandria became his home. He went to a French school, but at home they spoke exclusively German. All Europeans at that time spoke several languages. Unfortunately however, almost none of them spoke Arabic. One had little contact with the Egyptians, who were often referred to as Arabs, except for the servants, workers or the people in the market. This would not change for some time yet. In the consciousness of the Europeans at that time it had not yet registered that these people were the descendants of the ancient Egyptians. Here one of the first Christian communities was founded. The Islamization of Egypt started during the seventh century. Today about ten percent of the population in Egypt are Christians, they are called Copts. This word originates from the Greek word for Egyptians.

August had many friends in Alexandria including English, French, Austrians, Greeks and Armenians. There were many nationalities in this city. He was an outstanding student, especially gifted in mathematics and science. Even as a young boy he drew machines and definitely wanted to become an engineer.

August was fascinated with the project of the Suez Canal. He followed everything that he could find out about it. He was only about fifteen years old and dreamed of becoming an engineer and taking on such tremendous projects.

When Tante Helene received an invitation to the ceremonious inauguration of the Suez Canal, August became very excited. He definitely wanted to go too, and Tante Helene promised him that he could. Helene herself was also very excited. It was known that Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria would come. Maybe Empress Elisabeth, known as Sissi, would also come attend the inauguration? She traveled a lot and it was possible that she might use the opportunity to come to Egypt.

What did a society lady wear on such an occasion? August, too, needed a new suit, for he had once again outgrown the last one. After some preparation, the two traveled by the new railway from Alexandria to Port Said.

On the journey, August spoke excitedly about the Suez Canal. He questioned his aunt, "Do you think engineer Lesseps will be there too? Do you think I could talk to him?"

"That I don't know. I only know that the canal was built according to his design. He'll certainly be at the inauguration."

“In fact, Lesseps didn’t design the canal himself.” August was well informed about this. “It was an Austrian engineer, Negrelli, who developed the design. But Lesseps managed to raise the necessary funds. That was surely the main problem facing the implementation.”

“Empress Eugénie of France is coming, too. At least the newspaper says so. It appears that she is related to Lesseps.” The aunt, it seemed, was more interested in the social aspects of the ceremony.

“By the way, it is said that Eugénie is always very elegantly dressed. I hope I don’t draw unnecessary attention with my humble attire. I’m sure we’ll be introduced to Emperor Franz Joseph. Imagine how much all this will cost! No doubt Ismail Pasha, the khedive of Egypt, will raise the taxes. He always does that when he is stuck.”

In Port Said they were invited to several grand events with Khedive Ismail. Helene was well known in the khedive’s family through her work as a midwife and was invited repeatedly. Of course, her nephew August was always with her, and together they were also introduced to Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria. The emperor was happy to meet this woman at last. Even in Vienna he had heard of this famous midwife and was proud that she enjoyed such a high status in Egypt. The emperor seemed to have more or less recovered from seasickness. He must have suffered greatly on the passage from Trieste, or so his companions said.

The city of Port Said had been built only ten years earlier. It had been founded by Khedive Said Pasha, the uncle of the current khedive, Ismail Pasha, and there was the new port for the shipping routes through the canal. Many foreign yachts lay at anchor, having all come for the inauguration ceremonies. The khedive of Egypt was under the authority of the Turkish sultan but was relatively autonomous. He had been there for a few days with his new yacht,

the *Mahroussa*. The celebrations to which Helene was invited were held on the platforms especially put up for the occasion.

A lot of royalty had come. Empress Eugénie of France, the wife of Napoleon III, was the most elegant of them all. Empress Elisabeth of Austria, Sissi, was not present however. Helene was slightly disappointed by this, for she would have loved to get to know her. In addition, Crown Prince Friedrich of Prussia, Archduke Michael of Russia and many other members of royalty were present.

However, August was more interested in Ferdinand de Lesseps. He tried to remain close to him and actually succeeded in having a conversation with him. His knowledge of French came in handy, for Lesseps spoke no German and not much English.

Helene and August went with the royals on board the first steamer, the *Aigle*. Ferdinand de Lesseps was traveling on this ship too. A convoy of one hundred and twenty ships sailed through the Suez Canal down to Suez. Due to the construction of this canal, the passage to the Red Sea, the journey to India and beyond, and to South Africa had been shortened by many thousands of kilometers.

They all found the voyage wonderful. The young August was the most excited of all. This masterpiece of engineering impressed him to the core. It was then that he came to the final decision to become an engineer. Nothing else was an option for him anymore.

The voyage lasted sixteen hours. After a short respite at Suez, the whole fleet traveled back along the same route. Ships could travel along the canal in only one direction at a time. Today the canal is wider and ships can travel in both directions at the same time.

When August and Helene returned to Alexandria, they discussed his future. His aunt would have loved him to study medicine, for that had been her own dream in her youth. But August had totally different interests and eventually she relented. She reflected with him about what he should do. She knew that the construction of trains had a great future. Building machines, with a special focus on trains, was taught at the University of Vienna. Thus, when August finished his schooling she sent him to Vienna for his university studies.

August was happy to be back in Vienna again. He had left the city as a child of about eleven. He lived with relatives and Helene provided him with sufficient money so that he could lead a good life. August now studied machine construction and was a dedicated student. He got to know many people from all over Europe during his studies. One of them came from Korcula in Dalmatia. His name was Franz Giurgevich and the two soon became close friends. August told Franz about Egypt and raved about Alexandria. He would certainly return some day but that had to wait for now.

August specialized in the construction of trains. Railroads were being laid all over the world: all over Europe, including Austria, and in India, Russia and America.

When August had passed his exams and was a qualified engineer, he looked for a job in Vienna and was appointed by the Kaiserlich-Königliche Railway. He had the opportunity to attain his dream job and thus should really have been satisfied. But deep down he still wished to return to Egypt.

Helene, his aunt, came every few years to Vienna. She visited her family and informed herself of new methods and developments in maternity aid. She visited the physicians in the maternity clinic and asked to be shown everything. At that time many new techniques were

developed in medicine. In maternity medicine, too, there was much to improve and Helene was very keen to learn everything. On these occasions she always met up with August and tried to convince him to return with her to Egypt. But August, too, wanted to learn so many new things. His work gave him increasing pleasure and so he remained a few more years in Vienna.

It was not till 1887 that he at last agreed and traveled with Helene back to Alexandria. He was now thirty-three and Helene spoke to him about his future. He was to marry a very rich girl! She wanted him to have the chance to live like a prince. At least that was her plan. But August thought totally differently, and even during their passage they had heated discussions. Things were to be all so different!

In Alexandria, Helene continued her work again. August applied to the Alexandria Tramway Company and was soon appointed. His employer even offered him a rent free house, but for now August still lived with his aunt.

Soon Helene received a letter from Constantinople in Turkey. One of the women in the sultan's family was with child and her help was required. For the first time, August traveled with Helene to Turkey. There he took part in a hunting expedition. This expedition appealed so much to him that he later undertook several such expeditions, at times without Helene.

Later in 1887, August was kidnapped during one such expedition. A band of masked shapes besieged him and tied him up. At first he thought it was a prank, but soon he was put into fetters, blindfolded and taken to a camp. But he was lucky in his misfortune, for he was treated well. He could not see his guards, but he heard them clearly as they talked amongst themselves in Turkish. And these voices he would never ever forget!

Tante Helene received a blackmail note demanding a ransom. It was known that she was very rich and it was believed that she would pay a lot of money for her nephew. Helene never hesitated and paid the tremendous sum. A few weeks later, August was set free. He was unharmed and was in fact in very good shape. He immediately sailed home to Alexandria. He would never set foot again in Turkey, he was firmly convinced of that!

Helene believed that August should start thinking of marriage. She had for long now kept a look out for a suitable woman for August, but August wasn't interested in following her plan. He fell in love with a simple girl, called Aloisia, but known as Luisa. She too, was Austrian, but was not rich at all. Luisa was a nurse and actually Helene herself had brought her from Vienna a few years earlier to work with her. She helped Helene in her clinic and accompanied her during her deliveries. August and Luisa fell in love at first sight. August knew that his aunt would certainly not like this, but August and Luisa soon agreed that they wanted to get married. And then something very strange happened: Aunt Helene was appalled and tried by all the strategies she could to change August's mind. At first she promised him a lot of money. He was to find someone amongst the rich women of Alexandria. They attended many events and he was introduced to the prettiest of girls. Many of them were rich but August remained resolute. He wanted to marry Luisa! No other girl was eligible for him.

Why was his aunt so adamantly against this love match? August couldn't understand her. Hadn't she herself married a man whose entire family had been against the marriage? Even her own family had been against it. Couldn't she understand that one married for love? But Aunt Helene remained adamant and disinherited August. He was to receive nothing of her wealth. August and Luisa accepted this and at the end of 1888 they got married without any family present, with only their friends, in a Catholic church. It was but a small wedding

and Tante Helene did not attend. Everyone thought that this was very strange, but August and Luisa were happy.

However, perhaps Tante Helene's attitude had a good effect.... For August and Luisa were very happy without great wealth and August succeeded in providing well for his family. He had a good job working for the tramway. At first they moved into a villa with a garden put at their disposal by his employer. August and Luisa lived a very normal life. They had few possessions but they were well off. Two years later they had a son, Christoph. Helene looked after the young mother while she gave birth. Of course she was very happy with this healthy child. But she still did not change her will. Upon her death, her entire inheritance went to an endowment!

Later, August and Luisa had two more sons, Stephan and Alois, and a daughter, Rosina.

In 1897, Helene returned all alone to Vienna. No one knew why she left Alexandria. August never mentioned why she wanted to return. It may have been for practical reasons, for example the better medical care that she would receive. Maybe she had been homesick. She didn't have much contact with his family. In any case, she left Alexandria and August's family never saw her again. Helene never returned to Egypt. In Vienna, Helene still had relatives and she spent her remaining days there.

In the nineteenth century birds such as quails were hunted in the vicinity of Alexandria. Thus August built a hunting lodge. At first it was used as a lodge during the hunting season only. Then it was expanded and August and Luisa moved in. Later, the grown up children of the family lived there.

Due to a work accident, August lost an eye. While working as a construction engineer, a small object was projected into his eye, which went blind. To have this eye treated, he traveled with his wife and son Christoph to Vienna. There, an artificial eye (indeed several) was made for him.

August lived with Luisa and their children for many years in Alexandria. Then suddenly came the news from Turkey that he was to come as soon as possible. His past abductors had been seized. August traveled on the next ship to Turkey and was able to identify the abductors. He had never seen them but he recognized their voices. They were executed.

In 1887, August had finally returned to live in Egypt for good. However, he remained an Austrian throughout his life. He was not granted Egyptian nationality, just as none of his children ever were although they were all born in Egypt.

August died early in 1911 at the age of fifty-seven. Soon afterwards Luisa suffered a stroke and her left side was paralyzed. One hand was totally stiff and sometimes the children were startled when she held them with the ailing hand. One had to forcefully grasp the hand free. In 1925, Luisa also died.

Her children, Christoph, Stephan, Alois, and Rosina, however, lived on in their hometown, Alexandria.



August and Luisa Nagel with their children: (from left to right) Alois, Stephan, Rosine and Christoph, the father of Marie-Luise, 1897

Reiser

ALEXANDRIE (EGYPTE)

CHAPTER 5

Franz and Francesca

Korcula 1880

The family of Franz Giurgevich had a long tradition. For generations the Giurgeviches had been shipbuilders and so-called patricians. Although they were not aristocrats, they did own a coat-of-arms.

Franz, who as a little boy had played so nicely with Francesca, had grown up. He had finished his schooling and was now a serious young man. His great talent lay in technology. He was most interested in ship building. It ran in his blood so to speak. Now he wanted to be the first member of his family to study shipbuilding at university. Those were his plans. His departure had been decided. Before he set out for Vienna to begin his studies, he met Francesca Polovineo again.

Her family was to return home from Saint Petersburg to Korcula. Franz had already learned about this from the children's uncle, Giuseppe, weeks previously. He had long waited for this, for he could still see the little Francesca in his mind's eye.

At last they arrived. Franz was very curious. What would she look like now? Had she turned into a pretty woman? When at last he saw her, he could hardly believe it, for she was not just pretty, she was a beauty! He instantaneously recognized the little Francesca in her smile and it seemed that she too had not forgotten him. Maybe Maria had told her daughter about her little admirer of yesteryear? However, no one was surprised that Franz and Francesca were soon inseparable. It was obvious that they were meant for each other. Franz willingly postponed his trip to Vienna several times because he wanted to spend more time with Francesca. But at some point he could not wait any longer; he had to go to Vienna and start his studies.

However, before he left he went to Francesca's mother and asked for her daughter's hand. Maria had been expecting this and gladly gave her consent. The two thus became engaged. Franz would go to Vienna and upon concluding his studies, they would get married. It would be a long engagement, but they were both determined to wait for each other.

They were both extremely happy and spent the remaining time going for long walks. Sometimes they just sat in their favorite place in the port and looked out at the sea.

When it was time to say good bye, they both found it difficult. They promised to write to each other and kept assuring each other over and over again how much they loved each

other. Then Franz had to board the ship that would take him to the mainland, and from there he went by mail coach and train on to Vienna. Adieu Franz. Adieu Francesca.

Franz studied shipbuilding in Vienna. Once he had settled in, he made good progress. He took great pleasure in his studies. It was exactly what he had always dreamt of. Soon he found friends in Vienna and he got along especially well with a colleague called August Nagel. August grew up partly in Egypt and spent his youth with his aunt in Alexandria. The two young men hatched plans for their future. Franz definitely wanted to return to Korcula to his Francesca. August wanted to return to Alexandria.

Francesca and Franz wrote regularly and Francesca always wrote how much she missed him. Franz was very assiduous. He wanted to graduate successfully and then return as soon as possible to Korcula and marry his Francesca!

The prospect spurred him on and he indeed succeeded to conclude his studies in the shortest time. With his degree in his pocket and a few gifts for Francesca and his family, he set out on his way home.

When the boat anchored in Korcula, the news of his arrival spread like wildfire. Franz had not yet fetched all his things from the boat when already some of his siblings and friends were down in the port. Francesca was amongst them of course! She had already learned a few weeks earlier that Franz was coming back and for days she had been watching every boat. She had given one of the dockworkers some money to inform her immediately of Franz's arrival. That was why she instantly knew when he had arrived. The greeting was very moving for them both. Under much howling by the dockworkers and sailors they fell into each others' arms. They didn't care that everyone was watching. They had not seen

each other for almost four years. Then they carried Franz's luggage home together and Franz greeted his mother and neighbors. Later, Franz and Francesca went hand in hand to their favorite place where they could look out at the sea. They were overjoyed that they had at last overcome the long period of separation and hatched plans for their future. The wedding was to take place as soon as possible! Franz would look for a job so that they could start their household together.

A few days and weeks went by, then the wedding was celebrated. The ceremony was held in the church and afterwards they celebrated in the big square in the middle of the town. The newlyweds, their families and all their friends had donned their best costumes. The traditional costumes of the Dalmatians are colorful and richly embroidered. There was plenty of food, drink and dancing. The festivities lasted into the early hours of the morning, and Franz and Francesca had long gone and withdrawn into the house of Franz's parents. His mother had moved out and was staying for a while with her daughter. Thus the two had privacy and could enjoy their honeymoon.

Franz and Francesca started their household and lived together with Franz's mother in the family house. Franz worked in the shipyard of Korcula. A year later, Franz and Francesca had a little girl. They call her Aida, a name that was very popular at the time. In 1869, the Suez Canal was inaugurated in Egypt and Giuseppe Verdi composed an opera called *Aida* for the event, regardless of the fact that the opera was not performed until a year later. Francesca loved music and saw the opera in Saint Petersburg with her mother when it was performed at the czar's court. That is why the little one was called Aida.

Two years later a boy came into the world and they called him Joseph. He was originally to be called Giuseppe (after Giuseppe Verdi or even his grandmother's brother), but

because Dalmatia belonged to Austria, they choose the German version of the name and call him Joseph.

The economic situation in Dalmatia was deteriorating increasingly. Trade decreased and fewer ships were built. Franz and Francesca reflected seriously about their situation and whether they should emigrate to America, when they heard from one of the sailors that Egypt needed engineers. Franz was instantly hooked. Egypt seemed very enticing to him. The Mediterranean climate of Egypt was very similar to that of Korcula, which also lies by the Mediterranean Sea.

Franz immediately remembered his university friend, August. They had lost all contact, but no doubt he would be able to meet him in Egypt. August lived in Alexandria, he knew that much. Egypt was one of the developing countries and many experts were brought in from other countries. Egypt was at that time a country of immigration. Many people had come from Austria, France, Italy and Greece. All these people were well trained and that explained the emergence of an affluent class of foreigners in Egypt.

Franz and Francesca thought that living in Egypt might be the right thing for their family, so they packed their entire household. They also bought a lot of new things that they wanted to take along. In 1889, they traveled on a steamer from Korcula to Port Said, in Egypt. There Franz found a job with the Egyptian navy as a ship engineer. They had a good income and a house was put at their disposal. In Port Said, another boy, Illario, called Iller for short, was born and in 1892, another girl, Sylvia.



Franz and Francesca Giurgevich with their children: (from left to right) Sylvia, Marie-Luise's mother, Illario and Aida, 1893. Joseph had already passed away.

The oldest son, Joseph, sadly died of typhoid when he was ten. Illario was later always compared to Joseph and that burdened him greatly in his youth. It was constantly said that "He is not like Joseph."

The family lived in Port Said. They did not move to Alexandria till 1895, when Franz started a new job. Three more girls were born there: Gemma, Irma and Ivona.

In Alexandria, Franz at last met his friend from Vienna, August Nagel. This was not even very difficult for August Nagel was well known amongst the Austrians. Franz found out his address and one day he simply showed up on August's doorstep. It was a merry reunion. August already knew that the Giurgevich family was now living in Alexandria so he was not even surprised. The two exchanged news and got lost in their memories of their joint studies in Vienna. The two women also got along well.

Soon Franz made a name for himself as a dexterous shipbuilder. He was one of the best in his field, as well as an inventor.

Franz and Francesca became very happy with their large family. They spent many wonderful years in their new home town of Alexandria.

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PATENT-URKUNDE

N: 117402



AUF GRUND DER ANGEHEFTETEN PATENTSCHRIFT IST DURCH BESCHLUSZ
DES KAISERLICHEN PATENTAMTES

an Franz Giurgevich in Alexandrien (Egypt.)

EIN PATENT ERTEILT WORDEN.

GEGENSTAND DES PATENTES IST:

Vorrichtung zum Verhindern des Durchgehens von Schiffsmaschinen bei bewegter See.

GESETZ v. 7. APRIL 1891

ANFANG DES PATENTES: *21. Januar 1903*

DIE RECHTE UND PFLICHTEN DES PATENTINHABERS SIND DURCH DAS PATENT-GESETZ VOM 7. APRIL 1891 (REICHS-GESETZBLATT FÜR 1891 SEITE 70) BESTIMMT.

ZU URKUND DER ERTEILUNG DES PATENTES IST DIESE AUSFERTIGUNG ERFOLGT.

KAISERLICHES PATENTAMT.



A patent certificate issued to Franz Giurgevich in 1903, for the invention of a mechanism to prevent a ship's engine from speeding in rough sea

PAGET, MOELLER & HARDY
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OS. LEIBBEICH

PATENT-
GES. Z.
11. JÄNNER
1897.

Patent=Urkunde.

n^o 21342

Auf Grund des Patentgesetzes vom 11. Jänner 1897,

R. G. Bl. Nr. 30, ist dem

Franz Giurgevich

in Alexandrien (Ägypten)

auf:

*Umsteuerung für Kraftmaschinen mit um einen feststehenden,
mit einem Kolbenflügel versehenen Kolbenkörper kreisenden Zylinder*
ein Patent nach Maßgabe der angehefteten Patentschrift
erteilt worden.

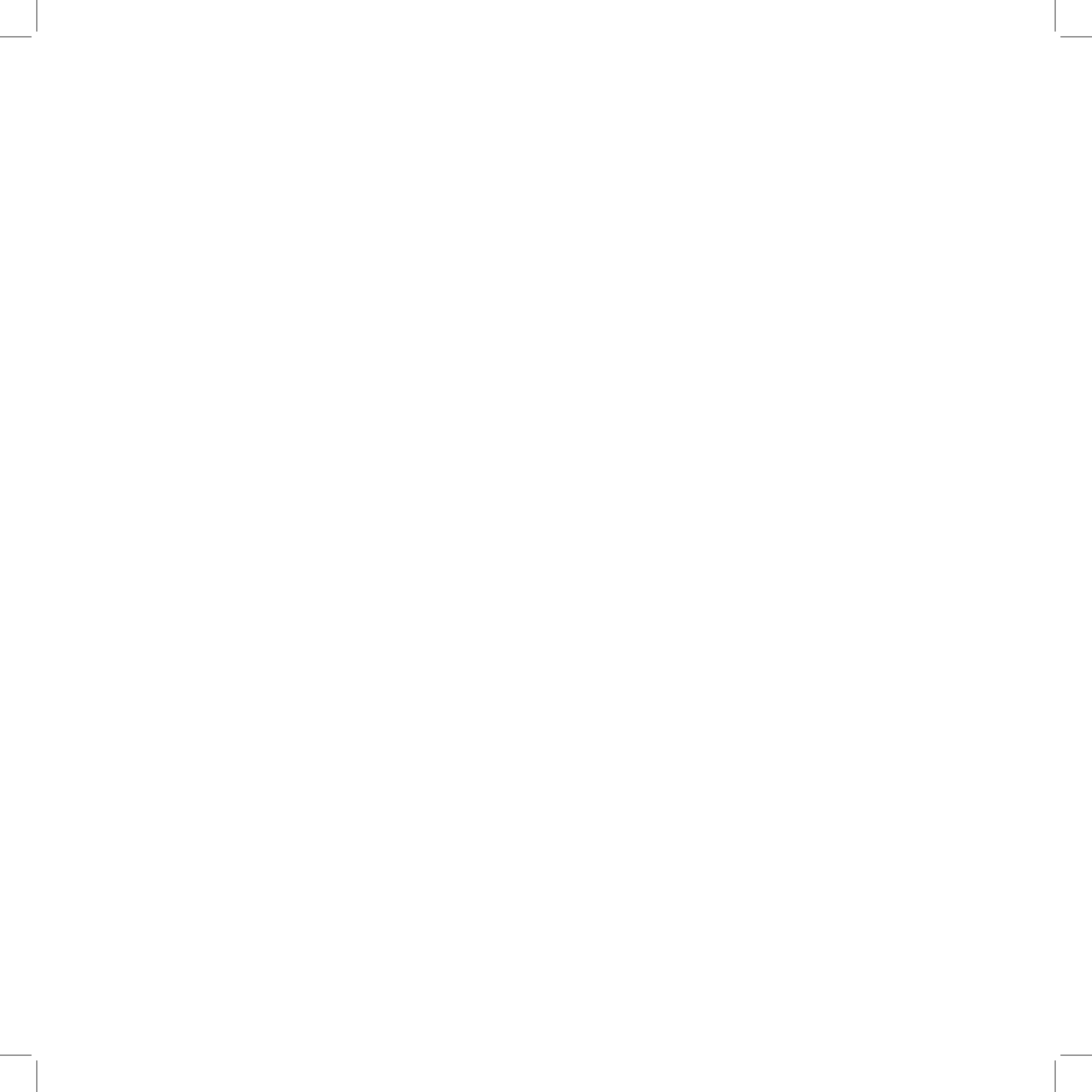
Wien, am 8. Juli 1905.

K. k. Patentamt.

Der Präsident:

J. W.
J. W. Schima

A patent certificate issued to Franz Giurgevich in 1905, for the invention of a special kind of reverse gear mechanism for power engines



CHAPTER 6

The New Generation

Christoph Nagel and his Brothers

Christoph, born in 1889, was the first of three sons. Then there was also a younger sister, Rosina. His parents were Austrian and hence he, too, was Austrian. His youth was carefree for his father was a well known man, an engineer and constructor of tramways. His mother looked after the household with the four children. They lived in the middle of Alexandria in a villa with a large, well tended garden. All the children went to French schools. There were schools for boys and schools for girls. Christoph did not want to pursue his studies like his brothers. He was interested in beautiful things like jewelry and decorative objects. He therefore went into apprenticeship with the best watchmaker and jeweler in the city. Almost simultaneously he began to save, because he wanted to open his own business as soon as possible.

Then in 1914 the First World War erupted. Austria was now the enemy of England. When the British occupied Egypt, all the Austrians, Italians and Germans were detained in a large detention camp in Sidi Bishr, near Alexandria. Christoph and his two brothers were arrested and imprisoned. They lived in big tents. In the summer it was unbearably hot and in winter icy cold. They were confined there for four full years from 1915 to 1919. They didn't have to work, but the inactivity was very bad for them. They were all young men who actually wanted to work or study. Now they were in this large camp and had nothing to keep them busy. To occupy themselves they started all sorts of handicrafts. Christoph was very deft and he made several boxes out of wood that functioned as a chess board and figurines. The prisoners played chess and tried to pass the time telling stories. Thus each learned the life story of the others.

Christoph soon found another pastime. With the help of a dictionary and newspapers, that he sometimes got from the guards, he learned English. At school he had learned only French. The treatment by the British was good, but of course they were still disliked by the prisoners.

These four years were very, very long for the prisoners. Time passed slowly and no one knew how long the war would continue. They would all remember this time and no doubt the British were now hated by the Egyptian population because of such measures. All these young men were of course also missed by their families. They could not contribute to their families' income. Life during those four years was simply interrupted.

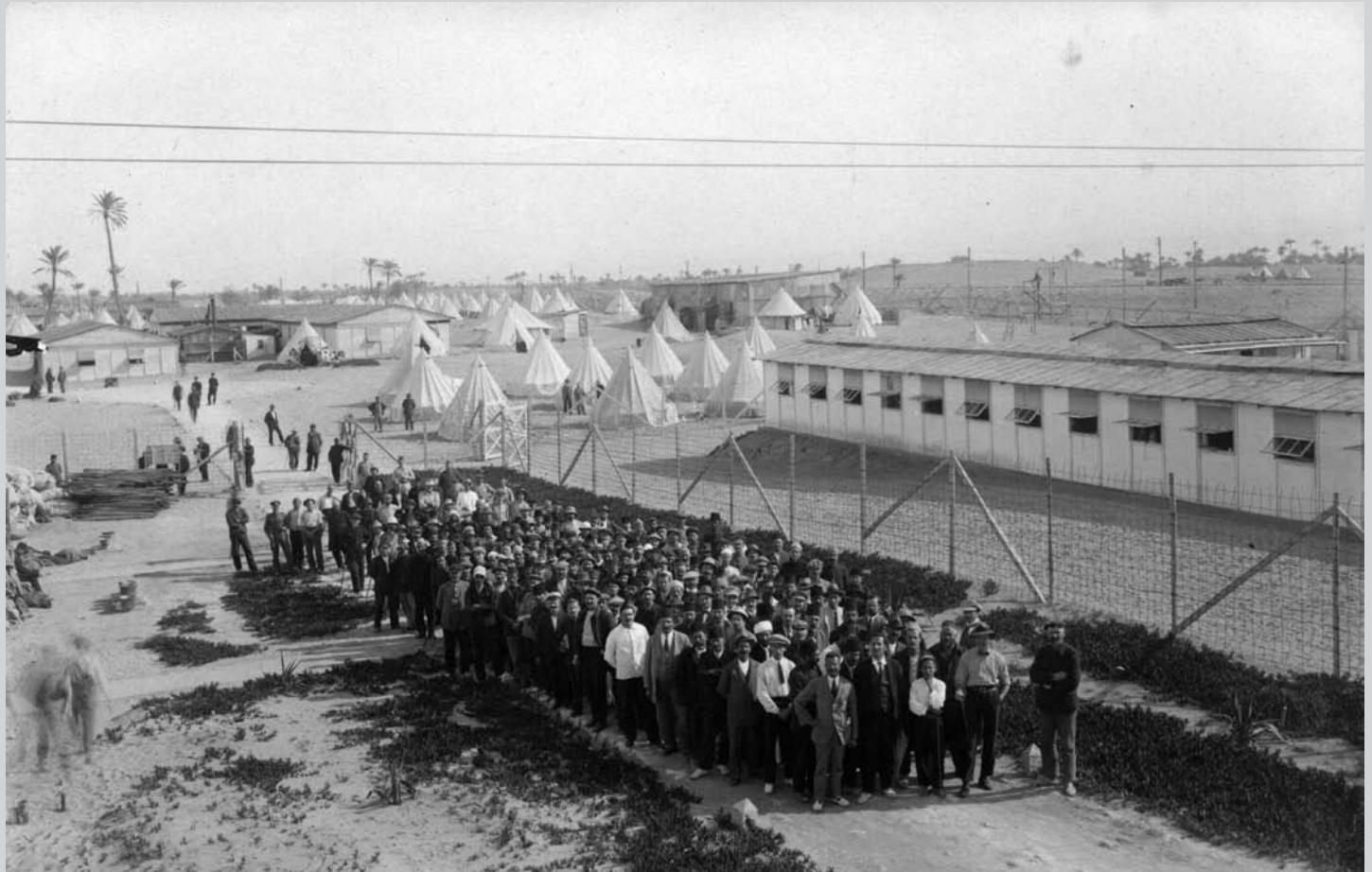
It was not until a full year after the end of the war that the prisoners were released. All their possessions had been confiscated. Christoph was embittered and hated the British. Some of his companions had not endured the imprisonment and had literally lost their minds.



The prison camp for detained foreigners in Sidi Bishr, Alexandria, 1916



Prisoners receiving food in the detention camp of Sidi Bishr, 1916



A general view of the foreigners' detention camp in Sidi Bishr, Alexandria, 1916



Alois, Christoph and Stephan Nagel seated in front of their tent in Sidi Bishr camp, Alexandria, 1917

The joy of their mother Luisa was tremendous when they were finally released in 1919. At last Christoph, Stephan and Alois were home again!

Christoph was lucky and managed gradually to accustom himself again to a normal life. He worked with the same jeweler as he had before the war and started saving again, for he had not given up on his dream of having his own business and had kept it alive throughout his period of imprisonment.

His brothers, too, gradually found their way about in their everyday lives. With time, everything fell back into its normal place.

The House with the Pretty Girls

The Giurgeviches, Franz and Francesca, had seven children. Joseph died of typhoid when he was ten, but there was still Aida, Illario, Sylvia, Gemma, Irma and Ivona.

All the girls in the Giurgevich family were pretty, dark haired and well brought up. They also spoke several languages. Their mother tongue was Italian, for the parents Franz and Francesca spoke mostly Italian with each other. Sometimes they also spoke in a mysterious Slavic language and that was when none of the children understood them. The whole family had Austrian nationality, for they had immigrated as Austrians, and the children, too, would always be Austrian.



Christoph Nagel, c.1919

At first, the family lived in Port Said. There Franz worked as a shipbuilder. In 1895, they moved to Alexandria because Franz had found a better post there. Franz made a name for himself as an inventor of apparatus for the enhancement of steamship engines. He submitted several patents in Berlin, Vienna and Italy. He was famous and the family was doing well.

The family was Catholic and they all went regularly to church. The Catholic community in Alexandria was not large and its members knew each other. There were also community events. Everyone knew the family with the pretty daughters. They spoke only of the "House of the Pretty Girls".

The children were all well brought up. The older children went to French schools, while Gemma and Ivona went to the German school.

Then the family was hit by a tragedy. The father passed away in 1913 at only fifty-five due to a heart attack. Suddenly, Francesca found herself alone with six half grown children. At that time they lived in a rented flat.

The only son, Illario, known as Iller, had a dream: he wanted to go to America and become rich. Maybe he did not feel that he was understood as a young man, because he was always compared to his dead brother, Joseph.

Shortly after the death of the father, still in 1913, Illario migrated to America. For his mother Francesca this was a sharp blow, because suddenly she had no male protection at all. A house with only women and all the daughters still single!



The children of Franz and Francesca Giurgevich: (front row seated) Ivona and Illario;
(back row standing) Gemma, Irma, Aida and Sylvia

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Egypt was not involved in the war, but the British were an occupying force. All the foreign families in Egypt whose homelands were at war with Britain suffered because of that. They were dispossessed of their fortunes and thus the situation became very difficult for Francesca. The girls all tried to find work. Illario had already left the country, otherwise he, too, would have been imprisoned just like the sons of August Nagel were.

Gemma worked as an accountant in the Galleries Lafayette, a large shopping center that was almost as large as the shopping center of the same name in Paris; Ivona became a secretary; Sylvia became a teaching assistant at a school. Nothing definite is known about the other girls, but they all had to contribute to the income.

Only Aida remained at home to help her mother with the large household. They had no servants and had to do everything themselves. One has to keep in mind that a household in the early twentieth century still had no appliances. The houses had no electricity and light came from kerosene lamps. Refrigerators, washing machines, dishwashers, electric stoves, ovens, vacuum cleaners: all these were yet unknown things. A woman had a lot of chores to do to manage such a large household. They cooked using a kerosene stove. The bread was prepared at home: in other words the dough was kneaded and then left to rise several times, then the loaves were taken to the bakery where the baker then placed them in his huge oven.

There were no readymade foods for everything was cooked at home and the vegetables were prepared by hand. Meat could be bought only on certain days when there was slaughtering. Minced meat was prepared at home, in other words it was minced through

a manual meat grinder. The laundry was washed in a huge washtub. Some items were washed in boiling water on the kerosene stove.

Yet the girls found the time for other activities. They practiced music and handicrafts and read Italian, German and French.

Sylvia was talented in painting with oil and water colors. She had friends with whom she sometimes met down town after work. They went for walks along the Corniche and sometimes they indulged in a visit to a nice café such as Pastroudis. But none of this started until the end of the First World War.

The Nagel and Giurgevich families in Alexandria knew each other. The fathers had been friends, and all the members of the two families were Austrian and belonged to the same Catholic community. They met regularly at church.

During these occasional meetings, Christoph Nagel fell in love with Sylvia Giurgevich. Yet how was he to make her notice him? He always met her but fleetingly, yet every time he returned home elated, thinking of her for a long time. Sometimes she passed by the shop where he worked. It was a huge jeweler's shop with many different decorations and clocks of every size and shape. The products were mostly from Europe. Christoph often thought of how keenly he wished to have his own shop. Even before the war he had had this plan. Unfortunately, the war broke out and brought him four years in the detention camp with many other prisoners.

Then one day, Christoph was standing in the shop and saw Sylvia passing by outside. On that day she was waiting for a friend with whom she had an appointment. Christoph had

enough time to watch her. It is not known whether she noticed him that day. But no doubt Sylvia had known for a while now that Christoph was interested in her. Women usually notice these things, even if they pretend that they are totally unaware of it. Christoph decided to talk to her as soon as he had the chance.

The opportunity soon presented itself. When the families went to church the following Sunday Sylvia lagged behind a bit to talk with a friend of hers. When her friend had left, Christoph plucked up his courage and finally approached her. She was not surprised, for she knew him fleetingly and they chatted uninhibited for a while. Then he took courage and asked her: "Would it be possible for me to come by your place today and talk to your mother?"

Sylvia became a bit bashful, but promised to inform her mother of his visit. One must imagine that at that time there were no telephones yet, at least not in a normal household in Egypt. Appointments were made in writing or verbally.

At home she spoke to her mother very calmly, not a bit embarrassed. Even then she still thought it concerned one of her sisters.

Sylvia was used to a constant coming and going of young men. "The House of the Pretty Girls" was well known and many a young man would have considered himself lucky to be received there. The mother, however, was very critical in her selection of future sons-in-law. Her daughters were to be happy, as happy as she had been with Franz. She had promised them that none would be forced to get married. Each was to get to know her future husband thoroughly.

So Christoph came in the afternoon and was shown in to Sylvia's mother. After the usual exchange of niceties and questions about the wellbeing of the family, he suddenly asked "Madam, would you allow me to take your daughter Sylvia for a walk some time?"

Sylvia's mother was astounded for she had not expected this. Sylvia was the quietest and most timid of her daughters. How had she caught this young man's attention?

Sylvia was called in and very convincingly played the role of the unsuspecting. At first she blushed, then she rapidly collected herself together and was excited at Christoph's show of interest. They immediately agreed to meet the following day, and from now on they went out together on a regular basis.

They met often and after a while got engaged. Half a year later they got married. In the following year 1921, their first daughter, Marie-Luise, was born. Maria was the name of the great-grandmother from Dalmatia and Luise was the name of the paternal grandmother. Hence the child was named Marie-Luise. Three years later they had another girl, Hedwig Josephine. The family then moved into an apartment in the city.

The other pretty girls, too, got married one after the other. The war had thrown everything into confusion. Some of them might have married much earlier, but many of the eligible men had been in the detention camp for four years. Gemma got married to a Lebanese; Ivona married a Greek and later went with him to Athens. Irma married an Italian and later lived in Italy for several years before returning to Alexandria. Aida is the only one who did not get married. Gemma, Ivona and Irma had children, and that branch of the family has meanwhile scattered in many different countries.



Illario Giurgevich, before he left Egypt in 1913

Illario, who had emigrated to America in 1913 just before the First World War, did not become rich as he had hoped. He worked in a bank and he had to travel a lot for his job. He sent postcards from all over the globe to his family. Anyway, he was doing well. He was constantly changing his job to improve himself. Thus he also traveled across America. He was married for a short period of time, but the marriage was not a happy one and they soon divorced. Illario did not return until he was retired, but not to Alexandria. He returned to the Yugoslavia of that time: the fatherland of his parents, Dalmatia, became his new home.

The "House of the Pretty Girls" was now empty. Francesca moved in with her daughter Sylvia and son-in-law August Nagel, and their two daughters who found in Francesca a loving grandmother. She was a lively woman with her hair gone all white even at that time.

There is a photo that was probably taken in 1923. In it are all the daughters (now married) with their children: in the front row from the left one sees Miralda (Gemma Giurgevich's daughter), Marie-Luise Nagel then two years old, Peter (the son of Rosina Nagel). Next to them sits the grandmother Luisa Nagel and George (Ivona Giurgevich's son). In the upper row from the left is a cousin of Sylvia Nagel's, Aida Giurgevich, another cousin, Rosina Nagel, Sylvia Nagel (née Giurgevich), then a friend of Sylvia's, her sister Gemma Giurgevich, grandmother Francesca Giurgevich (née Polovineo), Irma Giurgevich and Ivona Giurgevich. Unfortunately, the men are not visible in the photo, for it was probably taken by day when the fathers were all still at work.

In 1928, Christoph at last realized his dream and opened his own watchmaker's shop in Saad Zaghloul Street. He had two employees and in addition to watches he also sold jewelry. The finest jewelry at that time was made in Italy. In Alexandria all goods were available just like in the main capitals of Europe.



A family photo taken in 1923 with the two grandmothers: Luisa Nagel (sitting) and Francesca Giurgevich (standing). Marie-Luise Nagel, aged two years, is sitting in the front row on the second from the left. Her mother, Sylvia Nagel, is in the second row on the right.

Christoph had several hobbies, one of which was driving cars. He was one of the first people in Alexandria to own his own car. He also loved photography. Few beautiful photographs taken by him still exist. Unfortunately not many have been preserved. Christoph even participated in photography competitions and he won many prizes.

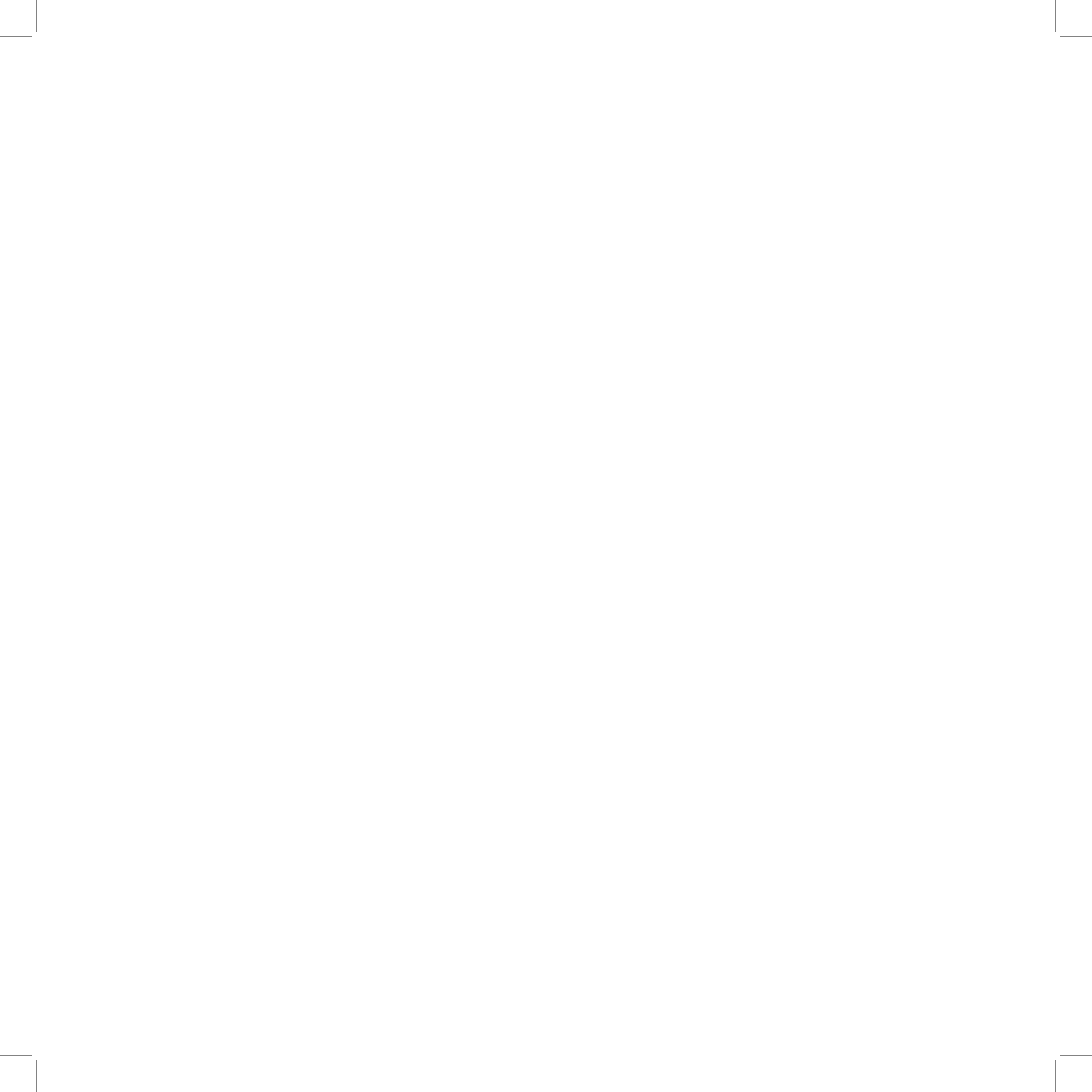
Sylvia loved change and therefore the family moved house a lot. They lived in a diversity of neighborhoods in Alexandria. The city at that time was not yet as populated as today for there was only about one million inhabitants (there are about six million today). When traveling by tram from the city center, Ramleh, eastward to the district of Victoria, one got to see beautiful villas with green gardens. In between these, the desert stretched across large areas, as was the case in Sidi Bishr. The whole city was clean and well kept.

Marie-Luise and Hedwig were lucky to grow up in this environment. They believed that it was paradise and would always remain like that. Indeed, it stayed this way for a long period of time, until the 1952 Revolution broke out and brought about the era of Abdel Nasser ... but more of that later.

In 1925, Grandmother Luisa passed away and in 1936, Grandmother Francesca died at seventy-five years of age.

PART TWO

The Memories of Marie-Luise Nagel



CHAPTER 1

My Beautiful Alexandria

I love Alexandria. I was born here in 1921 and my father, Christoph Nagel, was born here too in 1889. When I traveled abroad for the first time for a longer period, I took an urn filled with earth with me. Every day I would open the urn and touch the earth. I wanted to feel that I was still connected with it.

I am very happy that I was born in Alexandria. I have always loved the city deeply. I had a wonderful childhood and the opportunity to get to know people of many nationalities and learn different languages. It had a tremendous impact upon me. I think when one grows up like that one can never be prejudiced against others.

Three years after me, in 1924, my sister Hedwig was born. My father was then working in the best jeweler's shop in Alexandria, located on Rue Cherif (today's Salah Salem Street). He was very assiduous and saved because he wanted to start his own business. This did



Sylvia and Christoph Nagel with their daughter, Marie-Luise

not however hinder him from becoming interested in other things too. He was passionate about photography and was enthusiastic about cars, which gradually began to appear in Alexandria. At first, my father bought a motorcycle with a sidecar. That must have been in 1923. There is a photo of this motorcycle in which my mother and I are sitting in the sidecar. My sister had not been born yet.

My father did not set much value on neat clothing. He only dressed elegantly for special occasions. Then he would wear a *tarboush*, or fez, and looked very handsome. The policemen or soldiers would always salute him as they considered him to be a very important man, at least a minister or a high official. My mother, too, was very elegant. When she went out she would always wear a hat and gloves.

In 1930, my father realized his dream and opened a great shop for watches and jewelry on Saad Zaghloul Street. He was a watchmaker and had two employees who were also watchmakers, as well as a servant, and he sold the best imported items. In those days fine jewelry was made in Italy. Everything that was found in the greatest capitals of Europe could also be found in Alexandria.

My mother led a comfortable life, for we had servants and we were well off. We lived in the most diverse of areas in Alexandria.

In the commercial streets there were beautiful, large shops where one would usually hear French or Italian and at times also Greek. The shop assistants also spoke French. At that time, there were only few Egyptians in Alexandria; it was the city of foreigners: Greeks, French, Italians, British, Germans, Austrians and other nationalities were seen everywhere.



Christoph Nagel's jewelry shop on Saad Zaghloul Street

In which language do I think? I don't know. I believe that I think in the language in which I am communicating at the time. When talking to a friend in Italian, I think in Italian. When speaking French, I think in French. Most of my friends speak to me in Italian or French. They mostly come from relatively mixed families. There are many such families here in Alexandria. I have always read in French. When I was at the German school, my teacher asked me to search the French books for any bias against the Germans. In the French grammar book, there were illustrations that were anti German. The nuns at the school asked me to find these pictures so that they would be removed. Thus world conflicts—France was the enemy of Germany—reflected themselves even in our textbooks. As children we did not fully understand what this was all about. I just remember that our life was, in fact, hardly affected by these conflicts. At school we had so many nationalities. My best friends were a Lebanese, an Armenian and an Austrian.

My father loved cars. After the motorcycle with the sidecar, he bought a Talbot coupé. There is a picture of that car, too. Of course, it was great fun to drive in such a car along the wonderful Corniche. The weather in Alexandria is mostly fine and thus it was almost always possible to drive in the car with the hood down.

One of my great passions was swimming. I learned to swim at the beach in Stanley where we had a cabin and I went swimming almost daily. I went with my friends by tram. Sometimes I even went twice. I loved the sea. All the girls back then wore one piece swimming costumes of course. There were no bikinis yet. But no one went swimming in their clothes as one is bound to see so often in Egypt today. There were also Egyptians among my friends, but we spoke in French, Italian or German with them too.



The Nagel family and friends on an excursion along the Corniche in their Talbot, 1925

Occasionally we would ride on the bus. Of course there were already taxis and I always had a bit of money on me, enough to take a taxi, but that was for emergencies. There were no telephones yet, nor mobile phones. But life was safe and there weren't many accidents. There was also minimal theft. I don't know when that changed in Egypt. Today one is constantly afraid for one's handbag. There are so many people and anything can happen when one is out.

My second passion was reading. I read profusely and always had a book on me wherever I went. I mostly read in French, but I also read many books in German which I borrowed from the school library, and of course the major German poets counted among them. Today, young people don't read much or not at all. Some even ask why they should read, saying that they would rather develop their own ideas. But I think that is wrong. One can learn so much from books and this stimulates the imagination far more than television does.

Back then one could buy everything in Egypt. The goods that were made in Egypt were of the finest quality. First rate cotton was available which was exported to the whole world. There were wonderful fabrics, and an Egyptian suit could easily compare with an English one of the best quality. There were many textile factories in Egypt which made outstanding products.

In Alexandria, there were excellent restaurants and elegant cafés. The Corniche was a favorite avenue for walks. There was a famous restaurant in Chatby Casino. One would sit there overlooking the sea and enjoy the superb cuisine. The cooks came from France and jobs here in Alexandria were coveted. For us it was always wonderful to go to these beautiful cafés and tearooms: Trianon, Délices, Athineos, Pastroudis and all the others. In

many places there was also dancing, the music of which was played by the best musicians from all over the world.

At the Mohamed Ali Theater, the present day Opera House, concerts and operas from Italy were performed. The best orchestras came from Europe for these. There was another large theater on Safia Zaghloul Street, the Alhambra. There, too, operas were performed by great orchestras.

My sister and I had a good life. Only one thing bothered me a bit. My father preferred my little sister to me. She had blond plaits and everyone found her pretty. My hair was reddish brown and that did not count as pretty. My sister and I were both slim and fit. Later, however, my sister grew taller than me. I was 1,64 meters tall, but Hedwig grew to be 1,72 meters. I had to resign myself to the fact, which was a bit difficult for me. And yet I was my father's confidante. Only he had the key to his jeweler's shop. When he fell ill, he gave me his key and told me to take the tram to the shop. There the employees were already waiting. I would then open both doors and take the tram back home. At noon I would have to lock the doors and later open them again and in the evening lock them once more. At that time I was still twelve years old. I wonder today that my father placed such great trust in me. It was not totally safe, for I might have been kidnapped or the key been stolen from me. However, back then there was far less crime than today.

When Hedwig and I were a bit older, one would now say teenagers, we were allowed to go to so-called home balls—today one would call them parties—at our friends' homes. We both wore dresses made from fine material. In the summer we wore organdy or silk. We both loved to dance. We were taught to dance by an Austrian lady. Of course there were no men present then, only girls. At the balls, however, which were usually held in the



Marie-Luise Nagel, aged 18



Hedwig Nagel, aged 16

PARAMOUNT



Marie-Luise and Hedwig Nagel, 1940

afternoon, we danced with boys and that was always a great event. Our father would then pick us up in the car at a certain time. He'd always ring once, then twice. We'd rush downstairs because we knew he was sitting in the car in his pajamas. He threatened that if we were not downstairs the second time he rang, he'd come upstairs. And that, of course, we did not want to happen so that our friends would see Father in his pajamas! So we always hurried. That's how I spent my childhood and youth, carefree with loving parents and a large family.

My parents were happy, but in 1931 my mother suddenly fell ill. She had gallstones. My parents traveled to Europe because of the better medical care there. We children stayed in Alexandria and continued to go to a French school. Because my mother loved to change the apartment we also had to change school quite often. These were all French private schools. During the time of my parent's journey we lived with a family near the school and our relatives visited us regularly during this period.

My mother was first treated in Vienna. She soon recovered from her illness, and my parents traveled on to Budapest, Bucharest and Istanbul. All in all they were absent for a whole month. My family always had close ties with Austria and they tried to undertake such trips as often as possible. Much later we went with the whole family to Europe.

CHAPTER 2

The Great Journey

In 1937 I was just about sixteen years old when we went with the whole family on a long journey to Europe.

We had visited Greece once before. That had been a holiday of a few weeks. But our great journey was something totally different! When I think of it today, it still seems a like dream. My father wanted to show us Europe. We made a very detailed plan of what we wanted to see. I can still see a lot in my mind's eye: the beautiful mountains, the River Rhine, the green meadows, the clean cities. For Hedwig and me it was the first time to leave Egypt. It was really wonderful. We traveled for three and a half months and visited five countries—France, Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Italy—and toured a total of twenty-six cities. We traveled by ship to Marseille and then through France. I liked Paris as a city very much. Of course, the language played a role too, for I had learned French in kindergarten. For that

reason alone I already liked it there. It is only the people of Paris that I felt were relatively unfriendly and even then everything was very commercialized.

I kept a detailed diary of all my impressions, but unfortunately it was lost. My parents, sister and I traveled mostly by train and often remained several days in one place. In Austria, my uncle Stephan and his family joined us and we stayed together for several weeks. We saw everything we wanted to see. Back then I was particularly interested in art and monuments.

Our family was Catholic, so we went into every church as well as every museum. I was particularly impressed by Innsbruck and Vienna with its wonderful Schönbrunn Palace. We went for a walk in the park, and enjoyed the flowers and shrubs that were lovingly tended by the gardeners. I had, till then, never seen such beautiful flowers. At the end of the long promenade there was the Gloriette, a beautiful building decorated with many flowers. Hedwig and I would imagine we were princesses wandering about there. Mother and father liked it, too. We spent a magical day at Schönbrunn Palace.

A few days later we traveled by ship along the Rhine from Switzerland to Bonn. I had a pen pal there. I had never seen her before and was, of course, very excited to meet her for the first time, so we met as arranged in Bonn. The meeting between two friends who know each other only through correspondence had a special charm for us. We knew each other through pictures, but to find oneself suddenly face to face with a human being with whom one had exchanged thoughts for years was a very special thing. Kätthe had a brother who was a bit younger than her. He had at that time already joined the Hitler Youth. Of course, I questioned him about it. Why did he have to join in the first place? Kätthe explained to me that her father would lose his job if her brother did not join the Hitler Youth. Maybe her father,

too, was a member of the party. At least that is how I see it today. Unfortunately, I lost all contact with this friend during the war. I wonder what became of her.

At that time there were already a few things that one could no longer buy in Germany, or that had become quite scarce. Käthe asked me if we had butter in the hotel. Obviously butter was a scarcity. One rapidly came under the impression that Germany was preparing for war. There were placards with "*Volk ohne Raum*"—"People without Space"—printed on them. It was expected that Germany would start a war. At least the grown-ups spoke about this, but we youngsters perceived it only superficially. When one is young, one usually does not worry much about the future.

When we were in Germany we traveled a lot by train, but I don't remember the individual cities anymore. I do, however, remember that we visited Pforzheim where my father informed himself on jewelry and shopped for his business in Alexandria. He would let me choose the pieces and then selected from those the ones he would purchase. He also bought watches in Germany. My father also shopped for us on the way, buying clothes and other things that were not available in Egypt. But the quality of the goods in Germany was not that good anymore.

I remember that we drove through the Black Forest. We stayed in Bad Liebenzell for a few days, going on walks in the Kurpark and the forest. That was something very special for us all. I was mostly impressed by the wonderful landscape of forests, meadows and little villages. I did not know any of this in Egypt, where there was not much to be visited with the exception of the big cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said.

Italy, too, impressed me greatly, in particular Venice which I liked very much. My mother was in her element there, because Italian was her mother tongue. We, the children, spoke it well, too. We visited Rome, Florence, Pisa and of course Venice. From Naples we then headed by ship back home to Alexandria.

Of all the cities, however, I liked Vienna most. The city was beautiful and the people were very friendly. We felt at home there, for we were Austrians, in other words, we all had Austrian passports.

My parents were both of Austrian nationality. The Egyptian nationality was not easy to acquire at that time and until today it is mostly foreign ladies who marry Egyptians who are able to get the nationality easily.

Back then we had three months' holiday, and Hedwig and I came back even two weeks later. After this beautiful long journey then, Hedwig and I went back to school. I did not study just the regular school subjects, but also accounting, stenography and typing, in addition to anything else a secretary would need. At that time the graduates of the German school were in great demand as office employees. They had learned German discipline and punctuality, which were greatly appreciated in Egypt. They were also perfectly fluent in three languages. To this day, the graduates of the German school are greatly appreciated. They are found everywhere, in banks and in large companies. Today many women go to university. Education has been free since the days of Abdel Nasser and the percentage of female university students is higher than in many European countries.

And yet there is something I regret about that time. We never learned Arabic. The European families did not put much value on that, and in schools, too, it was not seen



Marie-Luise's class photo at the German School, 1936. Marie-Luise is on the left in the back row.

as important. Today things are different. When Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power, the educational system was reformed. Even in the private schools today all pupils have to complete an education in Arabic. They learn the classical Arabic used in books, in addition to the spoken language. I myself to this day still cannot read or write Arabic.

My father always wanted to listen at home to Radio Germany and Austria, in particular to the news. Alexandria was undoubtedly his home for he was born here, but somehow Austria and Germany were also his homeland.

In 1939, I graduated from high school and by the end of the year the war broke out. I found a job in an office. Unfortunately, difficulties arose because after a short period of time the owner of the business wanted to marry me. Since I did not want this, I had to resign. That happened to me again twice, thus I tended to work for only a few months at a time.

One of my best friends during that time was Faika, called Fufa by her family and friends. She was Egyptian and had a brother named Fouad. Sometimes she and I met in the city to watch a movie and afterwards sit in one of the beautiful tearooms like Pastroudis or Trianon, talking for hours. I remember how we would discuss in detail everything that had happened during the previous days. It was so nice to be able to share everything with a good friend and I was fortunate to have Fufa.

We would also often meet with a group of other friends, young men and women with whom we liked to go out. There were restaurants and clubs along the Corniche and the harbor and we had our favorite places including hotels like the Beau Rivage, San Stefano and Romance, or restaurants like San Giovanni and Pastroudis. Some of the young people



Marie-Luise Nagel and friends at Marianne, the hairdresser in Rue Toussoun: (from left to right)
A. Boulad, Faika (Fufa) Awad, Olympia Awad, E. Schilizi, Marie-Luise Nagel and Faiza Awad.

had cars and so we also enjoyed driving along the Corniche. I remember that my friend Fufa was with us many times.

I remember one evening when we were driving and listening to the radio in the car. There was some beautiful music, waltzes from Vienna. We stopped the cars at a place which was somewhat wider. We turned the radio up and danced in the open air on the Corniche. I have always loved to dance, especially the waltzes and some of those young men were excellent dancers!

That evening was one of my loveliest memories of that time in Alexandria. We knew of course that there was a war coming, but we were young and in spite of all we enjoyed our life to the fullest.

However, we did not see much of the war. For a while all windows had to be darkened in the evenings, supplies were short, but all in all there were few problems. My father had his business and Egypt was only indirectly involved in the war through the British. My father, incidentally, was a born collector. He had actually hoarded goods in one room, so that for years after the war we had soap, toilet paper and all kinds of goods. He had started collecting all sorts of things before the war, for he had feared that soon there would be nothing available anymore.

Most Egyptians, by the way, hoped that Germany would win the war. One would then at last be rid of the British, who were not particularly loved. However, things went differently.

It was during the war, of all times, that I met my first husband.

CHAPTER 3

War, Love and Revolution

A Gentleman named George Reginald Carter

George was British. A British man of all people! We met in 1940 and of course my father was very unhappy about it. That was no wonder after four years spent in the Sidi Bishr detention camp during the First World War. He hated the British from the bottom of his heart.

George and I moved in the same circles and we had mutual friends. George was a year younger than me, and he was actually one of my sister's friends. But he was interested in me, not in my sister! Maybe this made him especially interesting for me. At some point I fell in love with him. Or I thought I was in love. We were both still so young! He, too, came from a multinational family. His father was British, and his mother was half Greek and half Italian. George was dark, with dark brown eyes and was very tall. He was very attentive and always sought to sit near me when we were together with our group in some restaurant. At that time

we often went to dance and I loved elegant places. Along the Corniche there were many casinos where the best dance orchestras performed. And there were wonderful restaurants. We actually lived a luxurious life in the middle of the war! George and I fell in love, but I had great misgivings. I knew for certain that my father would not find it acceptable if I brought home a British man. For before I got to know George, my father once said to me, "You should marry whoever you want. It is only important that you should love each other. But please not a Brit!" My father had suffered in the detention camp at the hands of the British during the First World War, and he could not forget that. At some point I plucked up my courage and told my father about us. Though my father was not very enthusiastic, he did take George into the family and caused no problems for us. George was Catholic, like my whole family, and thus we were allowed to get engaged in 1942. George wanted to volunteer in the war, but I was against the idea, so he didn't do it. What woman would give her consent to such an idea?

Now I was engaged, but my fiancé was soon conscribed and had to go to war. In 1944 he came on leave and we were at last able to get married. The wedding had to be held within three days. George only had a brief leave and of course we wanted to have a short honeymoon.

Thus we started all the preparations and indeed everything worked as planned. We got married in our Catholic church, the Sacré Coeur in Ibrahimieh, and the reception was held in my parents' home. Afterwards George was a bit tipsy and confided in me the fact that he did not want to return to war. He begged me to find some way by which he would not have to return. He asked me to break his leg. But I could not do that and so we knew that the farewell was imminent. We went to Cairo for a few days and that was our honeymoon. After only twelve days, George had to return to the front. We did not really know each other



The wedding photo of Marie-Luise with her first husband, George Reginald Carter, 1944

well and we never lived together. Those twelve days were the only time we could spend together.

During the war George came to visit two more times, but those were just a few short days during which he had to go see his parents and meet his friends as well, and we hardly had any time to spend together. We didn't even have our own home and I still lived with my parents.

George was stationed in Italy during the war. Later, he hardly said anything about this time like most men who come home from war. It must have been very painful for them to speak about it.

When George came home after the end of the war he was a changed man. He had a shrapnel injury in his face. The headaches he suffered because of that injury were often unbearable. Nothing helped him and the doctor asked him if there was anything that might alleviate the pain. That's when George told him that only alcohol helped him. So the doctor advised him to always have a glass of whisky in the evening. A few years later the headaches vanished of their own accord.

However, George's character had greatly changed. He was easily irked and had become very egotistical. That's what the war had done to him. We no longer got along together. George could not find work in Egypt and therefore decided to go to England. He asked me to go with him, but I didn't want to. In fact, I wanted a separation. Meanwhile I had realized that our hurried marriage had been a big mistake. It may be that in the war many such marriages were hastily concluded. I discussed a divorce with George. At first he was totally against it, for he loved me dearly. But after some time he relented and in 1948 we

finally got divorced. George did indeed go to England. My sister Hedwig had also married a British man and in 1948 emigrated with him to South Africa. She still lives there today close to her two daughters, Gillian and Allison, and the grandchildren.

George soon wrote to me from England. Four years later he asked me to marry him again. He had found work in Rhodesia and was well off. He thought we could live together there, but I didn't want to be with him anymore. Yet he came every few years and tried to change my mind. It took him ten years to give up and then he married a British woman. He had two sons, but later on that marriage broke up too. George died in 1973 in Durban, South Africa.

The Revolution in Egypt and my First Miracle

In 1952 our beautiful Egypt transformed itself quite suddenly. It was not a bloody revolution, because the Egyptians are a very peaceful people. In 1954 Gamal Abdel Nasser assumed power and everything changed.

Many businesses and major landowners were expropriated. Small farmers were now to run the agriculture alone. Many found this difficult because they had never had to plan agriculture and farm on their own. Many things became scarce and services deteriorated. In addition, most imports were stopped and there was nothing available from abroad anymore.

My father's business too was no longer going well because we were not supplied with goods any more. We started considering whether it would not be better to go abroad. We had lived in our own villa for twenty years. When the business deteriorated, we had to sell the villa and moved into a rented flat. This is the flat in which I still live today.

In 1952, I spent a few months in South Africa with my sister Hedwig. That was shortly before the revolution. But the circumstances there did not appeal to me. I found the apartheid regime inhuman and unnatural, and I did not want to live like that. Although I had all the papers necessary to emigrate to South Africa ready, I returned three months later to Alexandria.

At that time, the revolution was about four days old. I knew nothing about it. Of course I came back because Egypt, and Alexandria in particular, had always been my homeland, and I wanted to live here. Had I known what was awaiting me, would I have taken a different decision?

My father thought differently. He wanted to leave Egypt and in 1953 went alone to South Africa to join my sister. There he opened another business with a Swiss partner. I stayed behind with my mother. We were supposed to follow him. My father had instructed me to sell the business. That was easier said than done and so I initially took over the management of the business. I had three employees and considered myself relatively safe. However, I did not manage to get the price my father had expected for the sale of the business. So I continued to run it and that became my job and our source of income.

Egypt was no longer the same: everything had changed. Many had left the country because it now offered only limited opportunities for businesses. Abdel Nasser had prohibited

all imports. The pretty cafés and restaurants remained empty and mostly closed down by the end of the fifties. Similarly, the elegant shops such as Printemps, the Galeries Lafayette and others all closed down. There was nothing to be sold anymore. That was bad. However, what was worse was that providing food for the many people became difficult. Everything became rationed: oil, rice, flour, sugar. There was no soap anymore, no body care items; all these were suddenly unavailable. On the streets, the number of well dressed people decreased. More and more Egyptians flooded from the countryside into Alexandria and occupied the city.

Thus I lived with my mother through some difficult times. I ran the business but would actually rather have freed myself from it.

Through my marriage to a British man I had, in 1944, been granted a British passport. Although I had now been divorced for a while, I remained a British citizen. During the Suez Crisis in 1956 I was thus prompted to leave Egypt and move to England. This time, England was an enemy of Egypt. I found that horrible. How was I to live in England? With my language skills I could maybe have found a job there, but I didn't want to leave my mother alone. Besides, there was my father's business that I could not give up so easily. I was at a loss and did not know what I was to do. To discuss the matter I went with my mother and a lawyer, who was the husband of my friend Karima, to the authority before which I was to appear. The lawyer wanted to find someone there who could maybe help us. I stood with my mother in front of the lift and awaited the lawyer. I believe there have been a number of wonderful coincidences in my life. There, I was to experience the first one. As we stood in front of the lift an officer stepped out of a door. He was one of my clients and, puzzled, he asked me, "Madam, what are you doing here?" I told him of my dilemma, "I'm to be deported because I have a British passport!" "But you are an Austrian!" he retorted. It turned

out that he was a very important officer. Within five minutes he had settled the matter, I had my papers and was allowed to remain in Egypt! To this day I don't know what might have happened if I had not coincidentally met him. For me it was a miracle.

My father continued to live with my sister Hedwig in South Africa. He wrote from time to time asking us to join him. But my mother and I remained in Alexandria because it was impossible to sell the business.

My father had been ill for a while. Unfortunately, he died in 1958 of a heart attack. We never saw him again and learned of his death here in Alexandria through a telegram. His body was then brought to Egypt and he was buried in Alexandria.

After my divorce from George, I remained alone for many years and still lived with my parents, later only with my mother. Gradually I started wondering if I wanted to live the rest of my life without a companion.

I had meanwhile almost turned forty and dreamt of a man with whom I would share my life! But it took some more time before my life did indeed take yet another turn and I fell in love again.



Marie-Luise, aged 40



Marie-Luise at the beach in Alexandria

My Second Miracle and in Love Again!

The year 1960 was a very bad year for our jewelry store, just like the preceding years. To make matters worse, I received a tax demand for a sum I could not possibly pay! Taxes were calculated in a very peculiar way. One was told, "You have two doors, so you must pay such and such in taxes." I had originally wanted to close down the business, but now with this tax debt I did not know what I was to do anymore. I was desperate.

In this deadlock a second miracle happened in my life. I was sitting in a hotel lobby awaiting a friend of mine. I was very worried and that obviously clearly showed on my face. In any case, a young Egyptian addressed me. That in itself was very unusual, but the question he posed to me was even stranger: "Madam, you look very sad. What has happened? Can I help you?" Upon which the dam broke and I told him everything that was bothering me. I poured my heart out to a total stranger. He listened attentively and that alone already helped me overcome my distress a bit. Incidentally, he was simply dressed and was wearing so-called *shibshib* or flip-flops. But then came my great surprise! It turned out that, of all people, he was an important tax official. He told me to come to his office during one of the following days.

Of course I went punctually to his office on that very day. I was asked in and he examined my documents meticulously. Then he did something that seemed to me an act by the grace of God: he halved my tax debts! At first I could not believe it. That was a sum which I could pay and I did so promptly. Afterwards I was able to close down the business and was at last free! I still remember that feeling very clearly. It was as if a great burden had fallen from my shoulders.

The whole time I was alone, there were many suitors who wanted to marry me. I turned them all down. The strange thing is that when a woman has very obviously no interest in any man, there are suddenly so many who swarm around. It seems that this particularly awakes the desire to tie someone down. I had had friends who had tried for years to find an eligible man. They were never successful. They were at times envious because I had so many suitors and yet had no real interest in any of them. And yet this changed at some point. I had now been alone for so long that I longed for a companion. So I went to church and prayed to the Virgin Mary that I wanted to get to know someone. I had been a pious Catholic for a long time. That changed only slightly with age. Today, I think more about things and there are many things in the Catholic belief that seem doubtful to me.

Then at last, when I was forty, I met my second husband. He was Lebanese. We had originally met many years before, but then I had not been ready yet for a serious relationship. He was the Lebanese consul general in Alexandria. I was selling tickets for charity at a cinema. He saw me and later sought me out. He knew my cousin's husband and thus we got to know each other. All this, however, was a few years earlier.

In 1959, I once visited a fortune teller with a friend of mine and asked her if I was going to meet someone soon. She said, "Yes, there are many in your vicinity. But the one you will meet is at the moment far away overseas." Later I found out that my second husband had been living in Rome at that exact time!

We had not seen each other for many years. Then when he was transferred to Egypt again, he called me and we met. It was not till then that I fell in love with him. He was the love of my life. We had much in common. I found it nice that he knew many languages and had traveled so much. We communicated wonderfully and had many topics to talk

about. We always spoke in French, never in Arabic. I don't really know why. Arabic was his mother tongue, but amongst the diplomats French was mostly spoken. For a long while we met regularly and I was soon very much in love with him. He must have liked me too, but our relationship was not yet serious.

That we did get married was actually quite strange. Essam had traveled to Beirut for a holiday to visit his family when I received the news from his secretary that he was coming back quite suddenly. She called me and said that he might want to give up his post. No one understood why he had broken off his vacation and returned so suddenly. Then he came to see me on the same day.

In this flat, where I still live today, the following conversation took place. I still remember it clearly. I see him in front of me as if it were just yesterday. He did not beat about the bush but simply asked: "Will you marry me?" and I immediately said, "Yes". I had loved him for a long time but he had not been able to make up his mind. For him it was the first marriage and he had never before wanted to commit himself. After he had proposed we sat for a long while discussing our future. Then he had to go, but before he left I told him that I had two conditions: first, I would not change my faith (Essam was a Muslim and I was a Catholic). Essam immediately assured me that there was no need to convert. Then came the second condition: "I can't cook and will never learn to!" Essam explained that there would always be someone in the house who would cook for us, and with that the issue was closed.

There were reasons why I could not cook, even though they may be a bit peculiar. When I was young I had an overly sensitive nose and would immediately feel nauseated with the smells in the kitchen. When for instance, garlic or onion was fried, I immediately fled from the

kitchen. My mother was an excellent cook and my sister too, could cook well. Only I suffered from this sensitive nose.

This continued for a long time and only subsided later when I grew older, so that now I can prepare my own food without feeling sick. My sense of smell is no longer as good as it was.

Much later, Essam's sister told me that he had told her on his visit to Beirut back then that he wanted to marry me. He had obviously been quite convinced that I would accept his proposal. She, in turn, greatly feared that I might say no. But all went well and we were together. We then got married at once, indeed several times.... First in 1963, we got married at the British Consulate since I was a British citizen. Later we got married at an official office in Alexandria in the presence of two witnesses. Then once more in Beirut at the hands of a sheikh according to the Islamic rite.

When my first husband died in 1973, Essam and I married again in a Catholic chapel. I had not been able to get married by Catholic rite before because Catholics have no divorce. This situation and the fact that I was excommunicated for that reason was a great burden to me over the years.

Essam's job took us to many different countries. Some places were very pleasant, others were less so. In 1964, we left Egypt for the first time heading for Europe. We went to Vienna.



Marie-Luise with her second husband, Essam Beyhum

CHAPTER 4

Life Abroad and the Return

Back then I was very, very happy for a number of years. I don't know why our happiness at some point came to an end. Was it perhaps the very normal end of a love story? Essam and I remained good friends and lived together. We led an interesting and exciting life.

Our first stop was Vienna. All in all we spent two years in the Austrian capital. My husband was *chargé d'affaires* at the Lebanese embassy there (there was no ambassador there yet at the time and so Essam assumed the duties of ambassador). Moreover, although Austria was close to my heart, I did not want to be totally separated from my homeland. So I took a small urn with earth from Alexandria with me. This urn travelled with me to all the countries where we lived.

At that time, Vienna was beautiful and for me it brought back many fond memories of the journey I had undertaken in 1937 with my parents and sister.

One evening, my husband and I were invited to a reception at Schönbrunn Palace. Coincidentally, it was my birthday. At the end of the palace's park I discovered the lighted Gloriette, the small building like a pavilion. I remembered the many hours I had spent there with my father and family. I saw my sister in my mind's eye and how she had danced about, and how we had imagined that we were princesses. I stood very still and felt the tears stinging my eyes. My husband came and asked me what was wrong. I explained that this was a very fond memory for me. We remained standing there and I told him about that journey and remembered my father and the beautiful time we had spent there, lovingly.

In Vienna we lived in a beautiful house and met many people. Compared to Egypt then Austria was a paradise. Everything was available in the market, the people were cheerful and one saw many elegant people. There was a rich cultural life. We went to the opera and concerts, and were invited to many receptions. We went to the opera ball, which is a great affair in Vienna until this day. We often invited guests to our house. I had a household and led the pleasant life of a diplomat's wife. Back then, I believed that those were our best years. My husband did not agree, but I believe that this was the case. Afterwards when we went to Beirut, he told me a week later: "I think you were right. In Vienna we truly had our happiest years."

After that we lived in Beirut for five years. We had a pretty flat which I furnished as I pleased. That was before the civil war and back then Beirut was a magnificent city (second only to Alexandria, of course). The flat was registered in my name and was beautifully furnished. The furniture came from France and I had plenty of crystal and very pretty silverware. A chandelier came from Vienna which was four hundred years old. Everything was beautifully decorated.



Marie-Luise and Essam in Vienna, 1965



Marie-Luise, her mother Sylvia, and her husband Essam, Vienna 1964

Then my husband fell very ill. For a long time they didn't know what the illness was. It was an extremely rare illness and I can't remember its name. In any case, there was nothing to be done and Essam lost an eye. Then, he was offered a new position: he was to go to India. For health reasons we preferred to remain in Europe. In 1972, my husband was appointed Lebanese ambassador to Belgrade, in what was then Yugoslavia. We remained there for seven years. We had a good time in Belgrade and met many nice people and were happy. During our time in Belgrade we traveled a lot, not only to the great cities of Europe such as Vienna, Rome, Nice and Paris. No, we also traveled much across what was then Yugoslavia.

In Yugoslavia we met many famous people. We met Tito and his wife Jovanka often, because whenever a head of state came for a visit with his wife, the ambassadors were invited with their wives. This used to be very exciting for me. I found some of them funny. For example Bokassa, the "Emperor" of Central Africa at the time, who wore endless decorations on his lapel and looked like a Christmas tree. I never met Idi Amin, the then dictator of Uganda, because he always arrived without his wife. I did not mind that at all, because I didn't want to meet him!

The British royal family came for an official visit in 1972. I was invited twice. Once as a British subject, for I still had my British passport, and then together with my husband to an official reception for all ambassadors. The queen of England was young and beautiful, exuding much charm. At the same time, she was very sweet, outgoing and elegant.

When we lived in Belgrade, I managed to see my maternal uncle Iller again. He had immigrated to America in 1913, and had pursued an exciting career with several banks there. From there, he had traveled to many other countries on business. However, he did

not become rich although he had been determined to do so as a young man. Strangely enough he had become a confirmed communist, a fact that was rather rare in the USA. That is why, after he retired, he went back to Europe, to communist Yugoslavia to be exact. He had invested his entire wealth in a Yugoslav life annuity. Unfortunately, his money was badly devalued and he now lived in great poverty in a room in Rijeka. No one in our family knew of this, for he was very proud. I was determined to find him, and with my husband, at last I did. Our car was transported from Beirut to Rijeka, where we picked it up in the port. Then we drove to Iller. I can still remember clearly how we drove up in our car. I was taken aback when I saw my uncle. He had become very thin and wore quite shabby clothes. One could instantly see that things were not going well for him. As the Lebanese ambassador to Belgrade, my husband had of course access to the highest circles. When the issue of the mishap of the life annuity became known, Iller was allotted a new lifelong pension and was allowed to move into a comfortable home for the elderly. That is where he spent the rest of his life quite comfortably. He died at eighty-eight. During that time we visited him occasionally and he told me a lot about his life.

As a young man Iller had met the love of his life. But he himself had belonged to the freemasons and therefore the lady could not marry him for her family, which was Catholic, would never have tolerated that. However, Iller could never forget her. As a very old man he once told me that he now kept seeing her over and over again, right there next to his bed. After so many years he still thought of her. Maybe as an old man he regretted that he had not given up his membership of the freemasons and married her.

He had married later but this, however, was a most remarkable story: as a young man Iller had had many friends and one day as he sat with them in a café his friends told him, "Iller, you should get married". To which he suddenly answered, "I'll marry the first woman

who walks in!" Indeed, soon a beautiful young woman stepped into the café. He started a conversation with her and a few months later they were indeed married. She was a divorcee with a son. Unfortunately, that marriage soon went to pieces when he discovered that she was unfaithful. Iller was very sad, partly because he had also loved that woman's child dearly, but could not see him afterwards. He never married again.

We drove from Belgrade to Korcula, the homeland of my maternal grandparents, Franz and Francesca Giurgevich. Korcula is the largest island in what was then Dalmatia. It was accessible only by ship and when one disembarked, one climbed the stairs towards a large gate and from there into a huge square. The city hall was there too and there were many streets leading to big mansions. The gate was locked in the evening.

In one of those streets lies the house in which the Giurgevich family had lived. My ancestors had probably attained the family coat-of-arms for outstanding services rendered. Thus we found the house without much trouble and I had to take a photo of the coat-of-arms.

I tried to imagine how my grandparents must have felt when they left their home. It was not possible then to travel about as one wished, as it is today. A journey from Dalmatia to Egypt was very expensive and also very time consuming. When one emigrated, the prospect of ever returning was very slim. My grandparents too, never saw their homeland again. Both died in Alexandria. Franz died as early as 1913 and Francesca died in 1936.



Marie-Luise standing near the steps leading to the main square in Korcula, the town of origin of the Giurgevich family



One of the mansions on the main square in Korcula



The Giurgevich coat-of-arms on the house of Marie-Luise's ancestors. It reads: *NO NOBIS DIE NON NOBIS* — “Not us God, not us”.

My Third Miracle

During the time when I lived in Belgrade I experienced the third miracle. I was still a devout Catholic, but I had divorced and then married a Muslim. I could no longer attend communion. This was a very serious matter for me and caused me great sadness. I would sometimes touch the hand of a friend who had just returned from communion because I just wanted one way or another to be part of it.

In 1973, when in Belgrade, we were once invited to the Italian Embassy. After the meal, two groups were formed. I found myself on a sofa with a bishop sitting in the armchair next to me. His name was Vincenzo Farano and he was a high dignitary at the Vatican. Later in 1979 he became a nuntius—a papal ambassador—to Ecuador. We started talking and I told him of all the places we had already lived in. Then I plucked up my courage and told him of my great affliction. He listened to me very attentively. He understood that this troubled me greatly. I felt I no longer belonged to the Church when I would have so loved to attend communion again. He spoke with me for a long time. Then he asked me to say a prayer. "Make the sign of the cross on your chest," he said. The bishop then uttered a blessing and said to me, "All your sins are forgiven. You may attend communion again!" I couldn't believe it. I was ecstatic and went home with my husband, dancing with happiness. For me it was a great miracle. After so many years, during which I had suffered so much because I no longer belonged to the Church, I was at last allowed to attend mass again and take part in communion! My life was thus set right again and all was well.

In 1973, my first husband died and Essam and I got married again according to the Catholic rite in a chapel in Belgrade. It was Monsignor Farano who performed the ceremony

which was held in utmost privacy. Essam had agreed to this ceremony for my sake. Thus we got married four times!

Ankara

In 1978 my husband was appointed Lebanese ambassador to Ankara in Turkey. Although we should have had a good time there, I fell prey to depression. The city lies nine hundred meters above the sea level and it was far too cold for me there. Nor did I feel the people to be very friendly. They were suspicious of foreigners, especially if one was not Muslim. And then there was also a private drama. I had discovered that my husband had betrayed me several years earlier in Beirut with a Lebanese woman. I was miserable. Although I forgave him, our relationship was never the same again for me. I did understand that my husband loved only me. But why most men are incapable of resisting another woman is for me an unfathomable mystery. Unfortunately, it was later repeated with the same woman. In any case, Ankara was a nightmare for me. In fact, not only for me. Most diplomats were happy to be transferred away from Ankara. That was in total contrast to Alexandria or Beirut, where many cried when they left.

But of course there were also pleasant experiences in Ankara. In 1979, we attended a reception when the new pope, John Paul II, was visiting. We stood in a line with the other ambassadors. All the people who saw him were deeply moved. Next to me stood the wife of the Greek ambassador, a Greek Orthodox Christian. She trembled with excitement and said to me, "Marie-Luise, I'll do everything just like you". She knelt in front of him and kissed his ring like the Catholics do. Even my husband was moved. I had never seen him like this

before. It was almost as if we had met God. That pope was unbelievably charismatic. Never before and never again did I meet such a person.

I would also have loved to meet Mother Theresa, but I was not that lucky. Some of the happy moments in life always reappear in my memories; for example the time when I was able to meet my nephew and nieces in South Africa. I loved them very much. Unfortunately, my nephew died in an accident when he was just eighteen years old. My sister and her children and grandchildren all live in South Africa. I have two nieces whom I see from time to time. I have no children of my own, but these two are like my own.

Meanwhile our house in Beirut had been completely destroyed in the 1975–1990 war and all the furniture had been plundered. Everything was stolen. We had kept my jewels in the bank but that had been demolished too and thus there was literally nothing left for us in Lebanon. It was no longer possible to live there and so we went back to Alexandria after my husband retired. Beforehand, he managed to sell a few plots of land in Beirut. At least those had been preserved for him.

Back to Alexandria

In 1983 then, we came back to Alexandria. My mother was still alive and was already living in a home for the elderly, which was founded by the Germans. I could have moved into her flat, but I didn't want to do that. It would have been very expensive to renovate the flat and live there. So my husband and I stayed at the Metropole Hotel. At that time, it was a humble hotel but today it has become luxurious. We lived in separate rooms next



Essam and Marie-Luise meeting Pope John-Paul II during a reception in Ankara, 1979

door to each other. I had my friends with whom I went to the club or played cards. I had no obligations. My husband and I ate at the hotel, always at separate tables.

My mother died in 1988 in the home for the elderly. She was ninety-six years old. She was buried in the Chatby Catholic cemetery, called the Latin cemetery.

In the same year my husband became seriously ill and suffered a heart attack. When he returned from the hospital I tended him for many weeks. Shortly afterwards he suffered a second attack. He recovered and I tended him. Although I still loved him he disappointed me bitterly once again. In 1990 and 1993 I traveled to South Africa to visit my sister, whom I had not seen for many years. During that time my husband was alone and the woman with whom he had betrayed me in Beirut reappeared. However, I only discovered that after my return. Afterwards he begged again for my forgiveness, but this time I could not bring myself to forget the matter. Our love had truly died and there was no turning back. After that we simply lived alongside each other. We lived for a total of twelve years in the Metropole Hotel. In 1995 the owners of the hotel had disputes and it had to close down. My husband moved into another hotel, the Delta. I myself was very ill at the time, suffering from severe bronchitis with high fever. I was taken to my mother's flat. It had remained uninhabited for many years and looked like a junk room. Everything had to be repaired which took a long time. I was already living in it at the time of the renovation and several people helped me with it and the rearranging of the furniture. It was a very difficult time for me, but somehow at some point everything was done and I've lived there ever since quite comfortably and pleasantly.

Since then, there have been a few difficult years for me. In 2001, I learned from my sister in South Africa that her husband had died and that she herself had suffered a severe stroke.

She has been half paralyzed ever since. Then my husband died of a third heart attack. Although we had not lived together again, I was very sad. Somehow, I was still attached to him. Nor did we ever get divorced. So now I am his widow. All these calamities took their toll on me and I became seriously ill. Maybe I had not cared enough for myself. I suffered from severe anemia and excessive urea in the blood. That was in 2001. I collapsed and went into a coma. I was admitted into hospital and lay in a coma for twenty days. I spent seventy-five days in hospital.

That is when I experienced my fourth miracle. I awoke from the coma and recovered. They wanted to take me into a home for the elderly, but I refused. I wanted to go home to my flat. Now I have to tell you about my faithful servant Samir. He is Nubian and has been with me for over fifteen years. When I was in hospital, Samir sat by my bed daily. Then he helped me back onto my feet. It is thanks to him that I'm back home now. Samir has a second job, but he comes daily for two hours. He cleans, washes and cooks for me. I need only to heat the food and have everything I need.

I did manage after all to travel abroad again several times. I went to Greece, to Italy and France. For some time now I am pushed around in a wheelchair when I travel, since the long corridors at airports are too tiresome. I don't travel alone anymore. Usually one of my nieces, Allison or Gillian, comes along. The last great journey I undertook was in 2004. I went to Paris and London. I still love Paris. It is an elegant city and I feel good there because I have no problems with the language. I don't like London that much, but then I have mostly experienced it in heavy rain.

I'm still relatively well, for I'm now ninety years old. I can still walk. My mind is very lucid. I can watch television in the many languages available now on the satellite channels. And I



Marie-Luise with her faithful servant Samir

can still communicate in the different languages I know. Sometimes I go out. I ask a taxi to drive me about and we go along the Corniche. Today it is a street with heavy traffic, but the view of the sea remains incomparable. I meet my friends, but unfortunately not many of them are still alive. I still enjoy playing cards and we often tell stories of the past. Sometimes we go to one of the clubs in the harbor. We look out at the sea and dream of the good old times in our beautiful Alexandria.