

Flemming Oppenhagen Behrend

The Key from Cordoba

A Novel

To my children: Bastian, Gabriel and Katrine



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Prologue

On September 10, 1771, in the town of Schwerin, the court Jew Jochim Israel Behrend dies. For many years, he has served Prince Ludvig as financial adviser and court commissioner.

His wife, Esther, is the daughter of Abraham Jacob Ahrens. Her mother was the daughter of Michel Ruben Hinrichsen, who came to Schwerin from Glückstadt in 1668. Esther has a reputation for being both gifted and beautiful, and she is well educated in trade and stockbrokerage which, as the story develops, will benefit their only son Joachim later in life.

But today, as the story begins, it is the father, Jochim, who is buried with high regard, not only among the Jewish community, but also among the high-ranking officials of the city.

Joachim is only twelve years old. Esther has taught him Hebrew and training in commerce, an education she began when he turned eight. Now that her father has died, it is Esther and her son who will take over all the important businesses that the father had established and taken care of until now.

It is a heavy burden that has fallen on Joachim so early on. He is well aware of what is now expected of him, and after the funeral, he retreats to his room on the first floor. He can hear that the guests downstairs have started filling the rooms, but he is not ready to meet them. Not now, not until he's had time to recover from the emotional farewell at the grave. From the stairs, a narrow passage leads to a small chamber. The surroundings are simple. A writing desk, a bed, a bookshelf, and on the wall an old clock, whose *tick tock tik tock* has a calming effect on Joachim. Above the bed hangs a picture of his great-grandfather, who was a rabbi in the city of Cordoba in faraway Spain. In the picture, he is holding a Torah scroll. In the background there are houses with tiled roofs, and behind these, the mountains rise. As Joachim lies in bed and looks up at the picture, his thoughts go to his last conversation with his father. It was only a few days ago he was called to his father's sickbed to receive his parting admonitions.

Joachim does not like being called in to his father. Such calls are often a sign that danger is imminent. Before knocking on the bedroom door, he takes a deep breath.

Here we go! he thinks, as his knuckle hits the heavy oak panels.

"Come in, Joachim," he hears his father's faint voice.

To his great astonishment, his father looks at him with a gentle expression, and with one hand he calls his son to him. A mild expression from his father is not something Joachim is used to. His father is usually too busy to concern himself with his son's well-being. "That's women's work," is his usual remark when Esther asks him to take more care of the boy.

"Come here, Joachim," whispers the sick man, and Joachim must walk right up to the bed to hear what his father wants to say.

Maybe he'll send me to Ahrens' grocery store for a bottle of schnapps, Joachim thinks. *Only as medicine!* he is usually instructed. Joachim has his own ideas about that. He understands very well with his twelve years that his father drinks a little too much, and preferably in secret.

But there are other things his father wants to talk to him about. He is just beginning when he is interrupted by a strong cough that causes his face to blush first, then to grow purple, and finally to turn white.

Joachim badly wants to run out and call for help but decides to do nothing. When Father has something on his mind, it's best to stand straight like a little tin soldier.

When the coughing attack is over, it takes a while before Jochim can breathe freely again and speak to his son. He is just about to start when the second round of coughing overpowers him. After the coughing has stopped, he has almost entirely lost his voice. Out of breath, he beckons Joachim closer, uncomfortably closer. The color returns to his cheeks as he looks at his son through unkempt, bushy eyebrows and says:

"Go over to the dresser, the top drawer, yes, and..."

Joachim steals over to the dresser and opens the drawer.

"I have hidden a key under one of the sheets, on the right side."

"At the bottom, Father?"

"Yes, of course on the bottom, have you ever heard of people hiding things on top?"

He shakes his head resignedly, and this makes Joachim even more nervous.

Joachim knows very well what is coming now. All children who are descended from the Jews in Spain and belong to what is called Sephardim¹ know the story of how the Jews had to flee overnight from Spain and Portugal, leaving their homes and possessions behind. The only thing they kept was the original key to their houses in Cordoba. Joachim knows the story because his best friend, Benjamin, has told him about it in a song his mother taught him.

Onde esta la jave ke estava in kanson

Miz nonus la truseron kon grande dolor

De su kaza de Espanja de Espanja

Shuenjos de Espanja

Onde esta la jave ke estava in kason?

Miz nonus la truseron kon grande amor.

Diseron a loz fijos, esto ez il korason

¹ Sephardim is the name for the Spanish branch of Judaism.

*De muestra kaza de Espanja, de Espanja
Shuenjos de Espanja
Onde esta la jave ke estava in kason?
Miz monus la truseron kon grande amor
La djeron a loz njetos a meter la a kason
Muestra jave de Espanja de Espanja
Shuenjos de Espanja.²*

The key to the house in Spain:

Where is the key that was in the drawer?
Our fathers brought it with pain
From their houses in Spain
Dreams about Spain
Where is the key that was in the drawer?
My ancestors brought it with all their love
And told their sons:
This is the heart that gives entrée to our home in Spain
They gave it to their grandsons and asked them
Put the key in the drawer
This dream of Spain.

Joachim's hand searches between sheets and prayer shawls until it finds the smooth metal key. His father's voice sounds almost normal when he asks, "Have you found it, son?"

"Yes, it's found, Father."

"Who does the key belong to?" asks Joachim simply, knowing full well that the question will please his father. At first, his father does not hear him, but then he clears his throat and says:

"You must take this key, Joachim, and cherish it as long as you live. Do you understand what I'm saying, boy?"

"Yes, Father, of course I'll take the key, and I'll take good care of it, but whose key is it? Is it for the synagogue or for our house?" he asks, key in hand.

² Printed with permission from Flory Jagodas family. From the LP *Memories of Sarajevo*

"No, no," says the father a little resignedly. "Are you going to tell me that your mother never told you about it?"

Joachim shakes his head innocently and thinks that up until now it was going fine! His father continues: "This was the key to the door of our ancestral home in Cordoba, Spain—before the Christians forced all Jews to leave the country. The Catholics threw us out, you see. They burned half the Jewish quarter to the ground, dragged defenseless Jews out of their houses, and in their rage against us they killed more than two thousands of us. They killed them in the middle of the street and blood flowed between the cobblestones. Two hundred thousand Jews were forced to flee. Those who fled to Lisbon suffered the same fate. In the end, the only ones left were those who converted to Christianity because they saw it as their salvation. The rest of us drifted north and east. Some settled in the Iberian Peninsula, others, among them our ancestors, chose to settle in the Baltic countries, for example here in Schwerin. We all kept our keys with a dream of one day returning, finding our houses and our homes again. A hopeless dream, but a symbol that we will never forget where we came from."

The father stops the story, turns his head away from the son. The cough overpowers him again, but when it has subsided again, he looks at his son with a serious expression and adds:

"That's all, Joachim. Now put the key in your pocket and promise me you'll take good care of it. Do you promise?"

"I promise, Father," the boy replies and puts the heavy key in his pocket before he bows and leaves his father. He wants to tell him how tiring it is to always hear the same story repeatedly, but he doesn't dare speak out against the powerful man lying there in the bed, now just a shadow of what had been in life.

Few Jews had achieved a position like his, which led to his familiarity with Prince Ludvig of Mecklenburg. It's not that Joachim isn't proud of his father, he's just tired of always having to listen to how much better things were back then in Spain. Why always this repetitive brooding over times long past? The apples were bigger, the grapes sweeter, and the sky bluer. The scenery was more idyllic and the people friendlier! There is no end to how wonderful everything was then and not today. Oh yes, and friends, never again would there be friends like them, friends you could trust. And so the parents' dreams of the past glory days in Spain continue.

Joachim is tired of his family. Tired of his father's expectations and tired of his mother's solicitude. He wonders about the fate that has befallen him, and he considers how he can escape it all.

The audience with his father is over. The key now lies in Joachim's pocket, and the metal feels warm. The father's cough can be heard behind the door as he quietly closes it.

The following day, when Joachim wakes up, his father is already dead.

After the funeral, his mother asks her son if he got the key, and he confirms it. He takes it out of his trouser pocket and hands it to her.

"Please take care of it for me a little longer, dear mother."

What do I need it for? he thinks.

Joachim goes downstairs to the guests who are filling the living rooms. Most visitors are poor Jews who see their chance to get a big piece of cake. The more distinguished people have gathered in the study where they drink cognac and smoke pipes. They discuss politics and talk about the newly arrived Jews from Russia. A big, fat man lowers his glass and exclaims: "Now we can soon look forward to becoming craftsmen on an equal footing with the Christians," and adds, "the day is not far off when we will live as well as everyone else here in the Baltic countries." He looks around triumphantly and laughs, but then suddenly realizes the inappropriateness of his pronouncement, which does not really befit the father's funeral. He mumbles something inaudible and quietly slips away.

Stralsund, January 1, 1783

Joachim has been up since four o'clock. After arriving by mail coach yesterday, he has rented a room at a hotel close to the harbor.

The journey from Schwerin provided no opportunity for sleeping. The hard benches of the carriage made it difficult to find any rest for the two days it took to finally arrive in Stralsund. The hostel was quiet last night, and the room cozy, with a small window facing the harbor.

It is impossible for him to sleep any longer. Instead, he sits by the window and tries to observe the activity down on the quay through the darkness. Ships are being loaded in the early morning. He can hear barrels being rolled over the cobblestones. From the ships' masts, which are dimly illuminated by the light of the many torches, Joachim sees all the colored flags on ships from many different countries. There is a two-masted schooner next to a larger ship from Russia. There's even a brig from the newly independent America.

Last night, after arriving and finding accommodations, Joachim couldn't wait but had to go down and walk along the quay. He stopped at a three-masted brig named *Washington* where a flock of sheep was about to be loaded. There were also cages with live chickens and large bales of linen piled up in the middle of the animals.

The men, who held lamps over their heads, were too busy to pay attention to the young Jew, but a large black man paused his work for a moment, looked him over, and then said something in English that Joachim didn't understand. His remark was followed by a big grin, revealing a wide, toothless, mouth. Joachim nodded back politely. He would have stayed there a little longer but was interrupted when four Swedish guards approached him.

No one in Stralsund liked the Swedes, as they were considered an occupying power that had ruled the area since the Thirty Years' War.

Joachim immediately saw that the guards were out to show off their new uniforms. Now they wore blue jackets with yellow cuffs, shiny silver buttons, and grey trousers with small tassels; the old felt hats had been replaced by high cylinder hats decorated with yellow feathers. The officer addressed Joachim in German and demanded an explanation for his presence by the ships.

"I'm just looking," Joachim mumbled and took a step back, bringing him dangerously close to the bulwark.

"Only people with papers in order and a valid travel authorization are allowed to enter here." The soldier looked at Joachim, challenge in his eyes.

"Completely understood. I'm leaving for Denmark tomorrow, and I'm staying up at the lodging house."

"Show me your papers now!" He raised his voice.

"I guess I forgot them in my room. Up there at the inn." Joachim turned and pointed to the building.

"Show me your papers, Jew," barked the man, taking a step closer to Joachim.

"As I said, I don't have them with me, but I was on my way back anyway, so sorry for the inconvenience." Joachim raised a hand to his kippah as a kind of greeting and bowed to the officer.

"*Schon gut, heraus mit dir,*" roared the man, causing the other three soldiers to burst into loud laughter.

Joachim could hear how they kept talking to each other in Swedish and laughing at him as he left the dock.

But yesterday is forgotten; today is a new day and the beginning of Joachim's journey to Copenhagen. His mother has arranged the crossing through trade connections in Denmark. She has contacted Captain Petersen, who sails in Stralsund, and he agreed to take Joachim on board as a passenger. She also contacted the Portuguese congregation in Copenhagen (the congregation where the Spanish-speaking Jews and others belonging to the Sephardim resided) and obtained special permission for Joachim Israel Behrend to settle in the capital as a man belonging to the Jewish religion. There was a little difficulty finding the right time for Joachim's voyage due to the large amount of sea ice that packed the Øresund (the Sound) near the Swedish coast, but mild weather from the south made the voyage possible again.

Winter in Stralsund is a dark time. The sun rarely appears, and daylight only slowly creeps in at mid-morning. Joachim stands at the window of the hostel and watches as a long, white streak of winter sun slowly breaks through the grey morning clouds. A good omen for the crossing, he thinks.

The maid comes in and puts more wood in the fireplace. She is Joachim's age. She is slim and almost as tall as him. Her curly, blond hair encircles a happy peasant girl's face. Her blue eyes blink

³ "Alright already! Get out of here!" [German]

coquettishly, and she sends him a fleeting smile before disappearing again with the empty firewood basket.

Joachim lies down on the bed and fantasizes about what it would be like to make love to the beautiful maid but then gets up again. It is no use anyway, the girl only brought firewood, and he will probably never see her again. Besides, he has other, more important things to think about.

At the end of the pier, he can faintly glimpse the sea, which today seems to grind its teeth at him. A fresh southerly breeze wakes up the waves to play. Joachim has never been on a ship before, and it fills him with a certain anxiety - the thought of sailing out to sea, where all kinds of dangers lurk. He sees himself boarding a ship in the same way a convicted murderer approaches the scaffold! These kinds of thoughts can make you forget time and place, which is exactly what happens now.

He completely forgets to go down to breakfast and instead sits and produces the strange key that his mother gave him before leaving. He carefully takes it out of the canvas bag he himself made for it. The key to the great-grandparents' house in Cordoba. A house that no longer exists, a time that living Jews look back on with sadness, but also with a clear memory of how everything can suddenly change. The key is about 10 cm long, one end is adorned with the Star of David, and the other, which activates the lock, has just three notches, one on each side of a square, which is also pierced with three small holes. All of which created something that once fit into, and could open, a door lock. Although the key is quite small, it seems to weigh heavily in Joachim's hand. He thinks it may be the many shattered dreams that make the key seem so heavy. As he stands holding it in his hand, he again has the thought of throwing it away, of freeing himself from the burden placed upon him, but he doesn't do it. After all, he has promised first his father and then at his departure, his mother, that he will always take care of it and one day pass it on to his firstborn son.

He sighs quietly and lays the key back in the bag, which he closes with a piece of twine. Then he tucks the bag in among the change of clothes in his suitcase. Then he straightens his clothes, collects his luggage and walks toward the harbor and the two-masted schooner *Charlotte*.

"Hello, Mr. Behrend."

The skipper, Captain Petersen, looks at him with an expression that reveals he is tremendously happy to see Joachim on the quay. His voice sounds raw, as if he has a weakness for rum, or maybe he's just been out in too many howling storms? Joachim is already annoyed that the captain is announcing his arrival so it can be heard all over the harbor and can't help but set the man right.

"Uh, it's actually Joachim Israel Behrend," he says when their eyes meet.

"Well, that's damned classy," adds the captain.

Joachim realizes that his appearance must seem a little pathetic, as he stands there in his old overcoat, a fur hat over his kippah, and two worn-out suitcases in his hands.

"Fair enough, Sir Jokim," the captain says with a laugh, as he walks down the gangway to give Joachim a warm handshake.

"Welcome to the *Charlotte*. She's in good condition and ready to sail today. It looks like we're going to have a bit of a seesaw trip up to Copenhagen. Not unusual at this time of year, but you get used to it."

Petersen's ship is of a considerable size for a two-master and is sailed by five men. One of them leads Joachim down to a cabin with two bunks. It's cold in the small room, but Joachim spots a small wood-burning stove in a corner. Through a deck prism, a faint light shines down into the middle of the cabin. The sailor who orients Joachim to the ship does not speak German and says something to him in Danish that he doesn't understand. Before he disappears again, he hands Joachim the two suitcases he has carried down for him. Then he touches a hand to his knitted hat as a kind of salute and disappears up the stairs. Joachim looks around and discovers that the lower bunk is occupied, so he sets his things in the upper one.

Up on deck, he soon finds out that his presence is a nuisance to the working sailors. In addition, the air is so icy that it takes his breath away. Back in the small cabin, he finds a small prayer book that Esther has given him for the journey. He takes out his prayer shawl; slowly and in a whisper, worried that someone might hear him, Joachim begins to read:

Eternal God, Your presence permeates the world. Wherever I go, may You be close to me on my journey. Amen.

There is a sound of steps on the stairs, and Joachim quickly hides the prayer shawl and book under the blanket. The door opens, and the sailor from before quickly grabs something from his bunk, turns to Joachim and says: "Ready to sail!"

Joachim doesn't understand him, but he realizes that it probably has something to do with weighing anchor.

A big smile spreads across the sailor's face before he again disappears upstairs to his work. Joachim is once again alone with his thoughts. He feels insecure and anxious about this journey. Anxious about going out in the open sea, about the cold and all the uncertainty that Copenhagen represents. He is sad to have to part with his mother but understands that she wants the best for him and that the business in Schwerin can easily be handled by his mother alone.

"There is no future for you here in Schwerin," she has said repeatedly. "Go to our friends in Copenhagen, marry Madam Phromcke's daughter, Rachel, and create a life for yourself."

Joachim knows she's right. He will miss Mecklenburg and his old friends. His mother has been very successful in carrying on her husband's business, and it has been going well for many years, but lately her investments have been disappointing. She has taught Joachim everything there is to know about currency, exchange and trading, and they never lacked for anything when he lived at home. She decided to send her son to Denmark so that he could create his own life and succeed. She has all too often seen young men come to nothing if they lived with their parents, and how their spoiled existence and arrogance became their nemesis.

"Our friends in Denmark will welcome you, and you will leave at an opportune time, as Denmark is bringing home large profits from their overseas colonies and has abstained from involvement in politics down in Europe."

She finally convinces Joachim to take the plunge and embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

Joachim has full faith in his mother, who had grown in prestige among the Polish rabbis. They called her "Queen Esther," even though she was of course not a noblewoman, but her straightforward and honest demeanor earned her a distinguished place in the Jewish trading houses of Mecklenburg.

It seems to Joachim that there is a sudden movement in the ship. He doesn't want to lose the opportunity to see the schooner sail out of Stralsund. He wraps the warm shawl his mother gave him as a farewell gift around his neck, grabs his overcoat and lurches up the stairs to the deck.

Sure enough, the *Charlotte* is about to leave the harbor. Captain Petersen stands on the bridge and shouts orders to the crew. He discovers that Joachim is standing on the deck and calls him.

"Mr. Jokim," he shout. "*Komm mal hier, jetzt geht's los.*"⁴

Joachim is annoyed that the captain can't pronounce his name properly, but he goes over to him anyway and sees how the sails catch the wind and make the ship move forward. The two men stand and watch the city slowly get smaller and smaller and finally disappear completely below the horizon. They are now in the Baltic Sea, and the ship begins to roll like a happy dog wagging its tail. Unfortunately, it is too much for the young Joachim, who at once feels that he is being lifted into the air as if he were a pendulum, and after reaching the optimal height, swings back, downwards, at the same pace as the initial ascent. His stomach does a flip and makes him feel strangely uncomfortable. The sea is covered with small, white ice floes drifting around the ship.

The wind has picked up, and Joachim feels an incipient dizziness. He apologizes to the captain and almost falls down the stairs to the cabin, which at the same moment seems to rise and meet him under its own power. He is lifted again and, out of control, tumbles through the door, which swings open and hits him in the forehead, after which he lands in the lower bunk. Dazed, he gets up and manages to climb into the upper bunk, where he closes his eyes while struggling to avoid vomiting. Strange noises from the ship fill the cabin. It is as if the ship is performing its own symphony as it glides through the waves, played on instruments he has never heard before. The sound of wood giving in to the forces of the sea, contracts, expands, and mixes with the sound of ropes being dragged across the deck. He can faintly hear Captain Petersen bellowing orders to the crew, who repeat his words as if it were some kind of singsong, where the singers answer the soloist. It is not long before the bunk seems to make the seasickness worse. There is no way around it, he must go upstairs for fresh air. As long as he doesn't vomit on the way up the stairs.

He manages to climb up and, in two jumps, reaches the railing, holding on with both hands before emptying himself to the sea gods. Embarrassing! What must the captain think! But he is busy steering the ship and getting the crew to work with the sails to achieve the optimal propulsion of the schooner.

"Tomorrow we will be in Copenhagen," says the captain to Joachim, who has hauled himself up on the bridge to distract himself from the seasickness. Joachim nods silently and apologizes before he makes his way back down to the cabin, his face green.

The small room is cold, and Joachim has not been able to find a way to light a fire in the small wood-burning stove. Fortunately, the Dane comes back carrying a bundle of firewood, which he puts

⁴ "Come here! Here we go!" [German]

into the stove and ignites with his tinderbox. A pleasant warmth spreads into the cabin. The sailor sits down in his bunk, pulls out a pipe from his trouser pocket, stuffs it with tobacco from a small leather bag, and lights it with one of the embers from the stove. The cabin is filled with an aromatic tobacco cloud which makes Joachim cough violently. The Dane sends him a look that clearly expresses his irritation over the cough. He begins to address Joachim in Danish, as if he is not aware that Joachim does not understand his language.

Is he really that stupid? Joachim thinks, but nods as if he understands the sailor. He turns around in the bunk to get some peace, but then he feels the man poking him in the back and making gestures to indicate it's time to eat. The man disappears, and Joachim follows, not to get something to eat, but once again to sacrifice to the Norse sea gods.

After the second round of sacrifices to the waves, Joachim suddenly feels better and seeks out the captain again. Up on the bridge, the two fall into conversation, and Joachim asks him in German how often he sails to Stralsund. Petersen tells Joachim that he mostly does good business by transporting grain that is sold at the market in Schwerin. On the return trip, he usually transports timber, which is in great demand after Copenhagen's great fire in 1728 when nine hundred houses went up in flames.

"Can you believe they are still building new houses after the great fire, and there are plenty of opportunities for a young man like you, but of course everything depends on whether you get a residence permit."

"I am not at all afraid of that, Captain, for I have excellent recommendations from the magistrate of Schwerin, who can testify that my father was a financial adviser to Prince Ludvig. My family has good connections in Copenhagen, and my mother has told me that it will be fine."

"Oh yes, if your mother says so, then it will be true," the captain murmurs sarcastically. Then he raises his voice, smiles and adds: "You'll make it, young man."

His right hand disappears in his jacket pocket, and like the sailor in the cabin, he pulls out a pipe, which he lights with his tinderbox after several unsuccessful attempts. To show his kindness, he offers the pipe to Joachim, who declines. He does not intend to start smoking; besides, it will probably make him sick again.

The captain continues: "Our country is in a very favorable situation, Mr. Jokim, especially with our colonies in the Caribbean and in India. The richest people in Copenhagen now are those who

trade overseas and bring home their profits. Even the slave trade has been beneficial for Denmark, but it's not something I like." He takes the pipe from his mouth, spits into the sea and continues.

"You will see for yourself all these great villas and noble buildings which the merchants have been able to build from the profits they make out of trading in Blacks! Ugh, it's disgusting."

Joachim understands what the captain means and is quietly pleased to have met a good and just man in Captain Petersen. Esther told Joachim that the family encountered the captain in connection with a loan he received from influential Jews in Copenhagen, where his parents borrowed money from Levin Moses Mariboe. This broker put the captain in touch with Joachim's father who, at one point, suggested to Mr. Petersen's family that they invest in a merchant ship and enter into trade with the merchants of Mecklenburg. His son Rasmus was only in his mid-twenties but already knew about sailing in Danish waters. He took up the challenge and began sailing to the Baltic coasts with the schooner *Charlotte*.

"The mysterious coincidence of chance, Mr. Jokim," says the captain and looks at Joachim.

"Joachim, Captain, there is an A after the O."

"Well, young man, I guess you can afford that. I guess I can learn to pronounce your name correctly before we arrive in Copenhagen," he says laughing and spits out into the sea again.

They stand silent for a while. It is still bitterly cold, and there is snow in the air, but out over the water the sun breaks through.

All day Joachim passes the time in the cabin on the *Charlotte* reading or daydreaming. The Danish sailor comes and goes but is mostly busy with the sails up on deck, and the constant measuring with the plumbline to ensure that the depth of the sea is safe during the crossing. He finally introduces himself to Joachim and tells him that his name is Anders Hoyer. When darkness descends and evening falls, Joachim sits on the edge of the bunk and finds the evening prayer his mother taught him from a very young age. He takes out his prayer shawl, jumps down on the floor and starts rocking back and forth while quietly reciting from the book.

We praise Thee, Eternal One, our God,

King of the world, Thy word commandeth the coming of the evening, Thy wisdom openeth the gates of heaven.

*Your knowledge makes times change and seasons shift, and Your will sets the stars
in their course in the heavens.*

*You create day and night, make the light
give way to the darkness – and the darkness to the light.*

You make day fade away and night break forth, and You separate day from night.

*You command the hosts of Heaven. We praise Thee, O God,
By Thy word, twilight becomes evening.*

With one hand, Joachim holds on to the doorpost so that the ship's movements do not knock him down. The small cabin gives him a sense of security even here in the middle of the sea.

From the Psalms of David, he reads the words: *Shield me under the shadow of thy wings.* He repeats the prayer over and over again. A deep peace envelops him, and he quietly climbs into the bunk, where he quickly surrenders to a much-needed sleep.

Joachim wakes up in the middle of the night to the loud snoring of the sailor, Anders. Life at sea is hard, and the crew shares the work. Each man is allowed to sleep for a few hours before he is replaced and must go back to take his turn again. They work with the sails or climb up the mast looking for any other ships or weather conditions that may pose a risk to the sailing.

The sailor's snoring makes Joachim remember the dog that followed him through his upbringing. He named it Schmutz because it was always dirty and was only allowed to be in a corner of the kitchen. Sometimes the dog managed to sneak up and hide under Joachim's bed. Then the dog lay there snoring, so it was impossible for Joachim to get any sleep. Of course, it always ended with Schmutz being thrown out and, disappointed, had to sneak back into the kitchen corner.

Another sailor, Jack, comes in at one point and wakes Anders up. The two men rummage around for a while but then disappear up to their work.

Joachim senses how sleep is slowly overpowering him again, but suddenly it's as if his father is standing next to the bunk and looking at him with a stern face.

"You must take care of the key, Joachim," he says, dressed in his shroud and with his face so close to Joachim's that he can sense the chill of the dead. The father continues:

"The key should always remind you of where we came from; that you are Jewish, and that we are not welcome anywhere. We are always moving, and we never have a safe home we can call our own." His eyes glow disturbingly in the darkness, and his breath smells rotten.

Joachim wakes with a start. His dream has scared him out of his wits. Sweat runs down his face and his heart beats wildly.

"That damn key," he whispers. Why on earth does he have to be plagued by the old story, and why did Esther insist that the curse should continue? Joachim considers whether he should throw the key overboard. Maybe it will prevent his father from reappearing in his dreams. If the key lies at the bottom of the Baltic Sea, will it still have power over him? There seems to him a certain satisfaction at the idea of his father together with the key, and that the key lying forever at the bottom of the sea. After the dream, it is impossible for Joachim to sleep again, so he puts on his warm overcoat, hat and mittens and goes up on deck. No one else seems to be up except the mate and a single sailor who is standing in the bow. The helmsman nods to Joachim in recognition and scouts out over the sea, where some large ice floes have broken away from the Swedish coast and are slowly drifting south. The snow has blown off, but the wind is freezing.

Joachim begins to doubt whether they will reach Copenhagen before noon the next day. He sits down behind some wooden boxes and imagines what it will be like when he meets the Jewish family. His mother has, as is her wont, prepared his arrival down to the smallest detail, and there has been diligent letter-writing back and forth for a long time. The most disturbing thing about the preparations was when his mother called him into her office one day and told him:

"You should know, Joachim, that one of the conditions for you to be able to live in Denmark is that you marry a Jewish woman living there, and that you have a profession you can make a living from. I understand that this is something of a surprise to you and that you probably have your own thoughts about it, but since it is no longer possible for me to provide for you here, and since your options are so limited in Schwerin, it is necessary that you go. Do you understand, my son?"

Joachim, in truth, was shocked when he understood what was expected of him. At the same time, he knew that his mother would never put him in a situation he couldn't handle. His mother told him about Levin Moses Mariboe and about Madam Phromcke and her daughter, Rachel, whom he was apparently supposed to marry. Had his father suggested something similar, Joachim would have fled the room, but with his mother it was different - it was a well-thought-out plan. The only disturbing thing was the thought of having to be with a woman he had never met. Of course, Joachim had thoughts and fantasies about women, but that was something he could only talk about with his best friend, Benjamin.

Joachim is torn from his thoughts when the mate shouts his name and points out over the water, where a brigantine is just passing the *Charlotte*. The American flag waves from the mast, and it was definitely the same ship Joachim saw in Stralsund. The ship easily overtakes them and then

disappears into the night. The sight makes Joachim forget the dark thoughts that the dream of his father and the key conjured within him.

He stays by the railing for a little longer, but he gets too cold and must crawl downstairs again to the warm cabin. He manages to sleep for a few hours before he is awakened by the sound of Anders Hoyer pattering with the wood-burning stove while quietly whistling and contentedly farting. He greets Joachim with a short "good morning" before disappearing out the door. The crew meets for morning chow, where Captain Petersen informs them about the voyage and explains the tasks that must be completed before arriving in Copenhagen. Joachim, who is now very hungry, makes a quick decision to eat what is served and not worry about whether the food is kosher or not.

The captain takes the floor and says that because of the ice, the ship has been set back half a day.

"This means that we either unload in *Dragør* or continue to the capital. I think that *Dragør* is a bad solution, as we then have to pay for the freight over land, and that can be expensive. Therefore, I have decided that we will continue up through the Sound and dock in *Nyhavn* as usual. I'm taking the chance, hoping the ice has not closed the port, and that we can dock before evening."

The captain finishes his little speech and turns his gaze to the plate of braised potatoes and boiled pieces of meat.

After Joachim finishes eating, the captain waves him over and asks him to sit down next to him.

"Just a few words for the road, Mr. Joachim."

Joachim notices that Captain Petersen finally makes an effort and pronounces his name correctly.

"You will probably find out soon that we do things a little differently than in that town you come from. For example, the Danes say things bluntly, whatever comes to mind. It may seem a bit offensive to strangers, but that's just how it is. Strangers often call us "boastful" and even "primitive," but that's only because they don't understand us. Another thing, young man, Copenhageners are not so used to seeing Jews in their distinct clothes, so you would do well to tone down the religious dress a little, if you understand what I mean?"

Joachim nods understandingly.

"And finally, my young friend," the captain looks at him with a twinkle in his eye. "If anyone tries to bother you, just let me know and they will have to deal with me. I can assure you that Captain

Petersen is not someone to have as an enemy. I know your family and friends in this country, so now you are also part of my family."

Joachim can see that the captain means what he says and reaches his hand out to seal the deal. "Thank you so much, Captain."

"No need to thank me!"

Joachim bows and let's go of the captain's hand. Joachim has now made his first Danish friend, and he looks with hope to the future – even though everything else is uncertain and worrisome.

It is early in the evening on a cold winter's day in 1783 when the schooner *Charlotte* rounds *Kongedybet*. Joachim stands by the railing and observes the snow-covered roofs that tower above the capital's protective ramparts. The *Charlotte* sails through the harbor and towards *Nyhavn* which fortunately is partly ice-free. It is only four o'clock, but the contours of the many buildings stand out sharply against the twilight. The spire of the *Vor Frue Kirke* proudly rises up into the sky, as if it wants to announce "Here, I am in charge!" The sails are gathered in at the entrance to the canal, and a small boat powered by six strong rowers comes to meet them and navigate the schooner to the quay. The captain finds a vacant place between the other sailing ships that have already docked.

Joachim hurries down to the cabin, takes his prayer book out from under the pillow and packs it into his suitcase. Then he goes back up on deck to be able to go ashore as quickly as possible and put his feet on solid ground.

From the ship, he watches the lively street scene. Colorful three-story buildings stand side by side along the harbor. The lower ones house restaurants, and Joachim notices some beautiful ladies on the third floor sitting behind the closed windows. It looks as if they are looking down at the ships for potential customers.

There is a bustle on the quay, where all kinds of goods are piled up in front of the various ships. Captain Petersen walks back and forth, shouting orders to his crew. There are a rumble of horse-drawn carriages and the sound of heavy boxes being unloaded from the ships. Rasmus is too busy to take care of Joachim, who must try to figure out how on earth he should now move forward on his journey. He grabs his suitcase and starts wandering down the quay. The street is sparsely lit by lights from the restaurants, but from some of the ships torches burn and cast a shimmering glow over the street. Joachim notices three drunken sailors holding each other upright while singing some popular broadside ballad. For a moment it looks as if they are all about to tumble into the canal, but at the last moment they reel back and continue down the quay.

On the corner of *Lille Strandstræde*, two night-watchmen come dragging a woman whose dress is torn and blood runs down her legs. Joachim turns in disgust and doesn't know what to do with himself, when he immediately feels someone gently tap him on the back. It is Captain Petersen who has followed him.

"Listen here, young man," he says in German. "Nyhavn is certainly not the place for you, I can see. There are far too many drunken sailors and prostitutes here, nothing for a young Jewish man in Copenhagen for the first time. Now I'll find a cab that can take us to *Skindergade*. We could actually walk, but it's dark now, and I don't want to get into trouble or fall into any of the refuse lying on the street."

Joachim stands with his suitcase while the captain disappears down the street. He suddenly sees that one of the ships at the quay is the ship *Washington*, which passed them in the Baltic Sea. Like the *Charlotte*, they are unloading their goods. They stack large boxes of boa tea, steel rods and other unspecified boxes on the cobblestones. One of the sailors, the black one who greeted Joachim in Stralsund, politely raises his cap and shouts something in English that Joachim again doesn't understand, so he just smiles, holds his hand up to his kippah and waves back, thus provoking a loud laugh from the man.

In the meantime, Captain Petersen has found a cabriolet and helps Joachim up with his heavy suitcase. They drive through the dark streets, and five minutes later they arrive at the address on *Skindergade*

The house had three floors. In there, behind the wall, his new life, his future wife and her mother lived. A sign on the ground floor showed that a furrier had his workshop here. The large windows astonished him, but the captain later explained to him that Denmark was no longer bound by the Norwegian glass monopoly, and that the larger windows now came from France.

Who will open the door now? Joachim thinks and feels the blood rise to his head. It is too late for regrets now, and it is a long way to Schwerin and to everything he has left behind. Amid the panic, he discovers that there is a mezuzah sitting⁵ on the right side of the doorpost. *Apparently, people are not afraid to show they are Jewish here in the city*, he thinks.

He is about to faint from nerves and feels as if he is going to vomit when the captain finally grabs the door knocker and knocks three times.

There is a sound of rapid steps behind the closed door, the sound of a key turning, and finally the door opens. A maid holds a light from a candlestick up to see who is standing out on the street. When she recognizes the captain, her face lights up.

"Well now, you gentlemen best come inside," she says and ushers them into a large hallway.

⁵ A small, decorated container with a blessing in Hebrew that observing Jews touch before going inside.

"I will fetch Madame Phromcke at once and tell her that you have arrived." She looks inquiringly at Joachim and smiles archly.

"They have been waiting for Mr. Behrend all day," she giggles and nods. "We live above the furrier's shop. Let me show you the way." She turns around and goes up the stairs to the first floor.

"Captain Petersen!" Madam Phromcke's enthusiastic voice rings out as she opens the apartment door.

"And Mr. Behrend! What a surprise," she says and claps her hands. "We've been waiting all day and weren't sure if the *Charlotte* would make it through the ice now that the weather has suddenly gotten much colder. We were down to Nyhavn and saw that there were quite a few ice floes in the water, but...well, here you are! Please come inside and warm yourselves up at the stove. Alma, would you please call Rachel?"

Handshakes are exchanged. She turns her attention to Joachim.

"You see," she says, smiling, "Captain Petersen is an old friend of ours, and it was so convenient that he was able to pick you up in Stralsund."

She is about to continue but is interrupted when the door to an adjacent living room opens and a young girl enters. She is wearing a long, white dress. At the neckline, an embroidered brocade collar encircles her fair skin. The sleeves only cover her arms halfway and end in brocade fringes, a pattern that is repeated halfway from the waist and down the dress, which reaches all the way to her feet. Joachim immediately sees that her facial expression is friendly. Her eyes are dark brown, her long hair is black and tied up in a bun, but locks fall playfully down her cheeks. She folds her pale hands, which look as if they have never seen hard work, and looks at Joachim a little embarrassed and uncertain. She finally manages to smile, but she is too shy to shake his hand. After a somewhat awkward silence, she finally stammers "Welcome, Mr. Behrend."

Strange that she doesn't address me in German, he thinks, but then he himself produces a comical little "Tank you so much," as his mother has instructed him.

"Say thank you to everything in Denmark, they are completely engrossed with their thank yous," was one of the last things Esther admonished him before he left.

His slightly comical pronunciation makes Rachel laugh, and he feels the blush rise to his face. *Maybe I should switch to German*, he thinks, but can't think of anything to say.

Luckily, the maid appears again and bids the gentry to come to the table in the dining room.

The dining room is large. There are three windows facing the street. In the middle is a large oak table covered with Danish porcelain plates, crystal glasses and polished silver cutlery, as well as

platters of cold dishes. The captain seems to feel comfortable in the company of the family but stands reverently behind the chair until Madam Phromcke says "Please enjoy the meal" and everyone sits down. Joachim notices that the captain looks dead tired. No wonder after the days at sea.

The hostess begins the meal with a blessing.

"Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz"

Alma serves chicken and all sorts of other things, and Joachim notices that it is not much different from what he is used to at home. Madam Phromcke has strategically placed her daughter directly opposite Joachim, who now, although he is very hungry after the trip, has lost his appetite from sheer nervousness.

Here I am sitting across from my new wife, and we don't know each other at all, Joachim thinks. The captain, on the other hand, reaches for the platter as if he hasn't eaten in days. He regularly raises his glass and offers toasts and good wishes to the family and the future of the two young people.

During the conversation at the table, which now takes place in Danish, and which Joachim does not understand at all, he cannot help but look at his future wife. Her facial features are fine, and her eyebrows form harmonious arches over her attentive eyes. Joachim has a hard time guessing her age, but she can't be much older than eighteen.

The captain has now completely taken over the conversation at the table. The good wine has done its thing, and he is completely unstoppable. Rachel smiles politely, and occasionally Joachim can see that she is also watching him probingly. The meal seems to last an eternity. Through the open window, Joachim hears the watchman sing that it is now nine o'clock. Madam Phromcke is in deep conversation with the captain, and Alma has just brought the dessert. After another hour of Danish conversation, it's time to part. The captain's gait is a little uncertain when he finally gets up and bows goodnight for the evening.

"Thank you, and good evening, dear ladies, I leave this young man in your care and wish all the best for their future." Alma hands the captain his hat.

He kisses the lady's hand, and again they say a multitude of thanks to each other before the captain staggers down the stairs. He quietly hums an old song as he disappears into the night.

Madam Phromcke turns to Rachel and says: "I wonder if isn't time we got Joachim up to his room so he can turn in for the night. Alma can show the way."

Joachim lifts the two suitcases and follows Alma up to the third floor. With each step, the suitcases seem to weigh more, and when they finally reach the top, he is as exhausted as if he had been walking all day. He throws his luggage on the floor and finds the chamber pot, which peeks out from under the bed. After peeing and putting the lid on, he puts it outside the door so that the maid can remove it in the morning.

The room is spacious, faces east, and will be nice and bright during the day, he thinks. There is a wide bed, a washbasin, a desk and an old plush sofa. A bookcase under the windowsill completes the cozy room. On a small bedside table is a lit kerosene lamp, which the maid probably lit before he moved in. Fully dressed, Joachim lies down on the bed and lets his thoughts fly until sleep overtakes consciousness.

He wakes up early in the morning. It is still pitch dark. There is a rattling and shouting from down in the backyard. Joachim opens a window to see what is going on. An icy breeze rushes to meet him. It is the night men who are emptying the latrines. They have taken the cover off from a large, excavated hole, and the stench spreads quickly - so quickly that Joachim immediately gets sick from the nauseating smell and slams the window shut. He says a short prayer and thanks his god that it has not been his fate to have to empty the latrines. He tries to sleep a little again and succeeds until he is woken up a little later. This time by Alma, who gently knocks on his door and announces that breakfast is served in the dining room. Joachim sits down on the bed and says in a low voice:

"I thank You, Living and Eternal God, for You have given me back my soul with love; great is Your faithfulness."

Outside the window, the bells of the Church of Our Lady ring for morning worship.

Madam Phromcke is already working on breakfast, which consists of porridge, bread and tea. She smiles at Joachim and speaks to him in German.

"We need to teach you Danish as soon as possible, as it will be difficult for you to only be able to speak German. Of course, there are many people here in town who will be able to understand you, but now it's mainly Danish that most people speak. I have arranged a Danish teacher for you, a Mr. Isac Cohen. He will come this very afternoon." Madam Phromcke gently puts a hand on Joachim's arm and continues:

"I will explain to the authorities that you have arrived, and I have decided to tell them that you are going to start a fabric printing press and that you have brought your own capital to the venture. Of course, this is just a pretense to get you into the country, Mr. Joachim, but naturally no one needs to know, do they?"

Joachim listens with interest between spoonfuls of oatmeal and thinks his own thoughts. *I wonder if the dear Madame Phromcke is aware of how difficult it can be for a Jew to settle in Denmark.*

His thoughts are disturbed when Rachel appears in the doorway wearing a blue linen dress under a red apron full of paint stains. She realizes she has barged into their conversation but turns her gaze to Joachim.

"Would you like to see my study?" she asks, sending Joachim an inviting smile. Then she gives the mother a questioning look.

The mother nods in agreement. She understands that the two young people must get to know each other now if the whole marriage arrangement is to succeed.

"Just go with Rachel, Mr. Joachim. My daughter is actually quite talented."

Joachim doesn't really know what they're talking about but stands and bows to both women.

"With pleasure," he says, following Rachel.

She leads him through a corridor to a door. He can't help but notice her slender hand gripping the doorknob. As she opens the door, he stands behind her in astonishment. The room is full of paintings and canvases of all sizes, which are stacked along the walls. In the middle of the room is an easel with a covered frame. Rachel goes and removes the cloth, which reveals a picture of a young woman sitting by a lake. She is dressed in a long, white dress and holds an umbrella in her hand.

Joachim has a hard time finding the right words but finally finds his voice.

"You're an artist, Miss Rachel! When did you start painting?"

"As soon as I could hold a brush."

"I could, for example, make a painting of you, Mr. Joachim," she says, laughing heartily.

As she speaks, a lock of her hair casually falls down her cheek. Joachim has to look away so as not to show his embarrassment. He can't stop thinking about his own appearance. His curly, black hair which he comb back into a braid, stands in stark contrast to the current, more traditional, conservative Jewish fashion. How on earth could he wish for a painting?

"I don't think that's a good idea, despite your natural talent. Besides, who would like a painting of me?"

"Well, I think your appearance is extremely interesting and could be a good painting," she continues.

"Interesting?" Joachim doesn't know if it's a compliment or if she's making fun of him, so he changes the subject.

"Who is the lady in your new painting?"

"She's also a bit of a painter, but I think she does it mostly for fun and to keep me company. She belongs to the Sephardic congregation just like us. You will meet her one of these days, as she is my best friend and often comes by."

"I have to concentrate on learning Danish. My teacher, Mr. Cohen is coming by today to give me my first introduction to the language. My mother has given me a recommendation from the magistrate in Schwerin, which will help me to stay in Copenhagen."

"Fine," Rachel says, a little disappointed, and looks down at her brushes. "Maybe we can continue our conversation later," she says, raising both arms and straightening her hair.

Joachim excuses himself and goes back to Madam Phromcke, who is in the process of instructing Alma about the day's tasks. When she has finished delegating the work, Joachim hands her the letter that his mother has given him as a recommendation to the magistrate and the city council in Copenhagen. It is written in German, but translates as follows:

Joachim Israel Behrend's father, Israel Behrend, has for many years served His Highness Prince Ludvig as a court Jew and advisor in financial ventures, to the great satisfaction of the Prince. His only son, Joachim Israel Behrend, has been helping his mother in her advisory business for the past six years to the greatest satisfaction. He is a diligent trader and has never been in conflict with any of the local legislative authorities. We recommend him and know that he will continue to stand by his high moral standards.

Madam Phromcke reads the letter aloud and is extremely satisfied, adding:

"I will also obtain some good words from the council of elders at the synagogue just in case. You can never have too many recommendations. That way, we will get the correct permission, Mr. Behrend."

She is interrupted by a loud knock on the front door. "Alma, would you please see who it is?"

The maid rushes down the stairs and opens the door. Outside stands a small, fat man. His face is deep red, the mark of some alcoholics. On his nose, he sports a pair of small glasses that constantly slide down, and which he constantly pushes into place.

"I'm here to teach the newcomer Danish," he says to Alma. Without waiting for her answer, he steps past her into the hallway. After climbing the stairs to the second floor at breakneck speed, he reaches his hand out and addresses Joachim in Spanish. However, he soon sees that his new student does not respond to Spanish, so he switches to German.

"Well now, don't you speak Spanish, young man? I thought you were of the Sephardic branch of Judaism. Was it not Spain that your family originally came from? Cordoba, if I have understood correctly."

"We didn't speak Ladino at home in Schwerin, we only spoke German," Joachim replies a little awkwardly.

"Oh." Mr. Cohen pauses and seems a little disappointed.

"Well, then we'll take it in German, but let's concentrate our conversation on teaching you Danish." They sit down at the table in the dining room, and Mr. Cohen begins his Danish lesson.

Joachim quickly becomes confused. German, which he is so used to, seems logical, whereas Danish seems simpler and more muddled to him. After half an hour, he has mixed up the words so much that Mr. Cohen covers his face with his hands and moans resignedly. He pulls a small bottle of cognac out of his pocket and strengthens himself with the noble drink, which only intensifies his complexion, but not his patience. Eventually, he's had enough.

"Dear young man," he says, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"I think we will have to continue in a few days."

Joachim nods silently and leads him down to the street.

"Mini tanks," he says experimentally.

Mr. Cohen looks at him, almost as if he is offended, and hurries down the sidewalk.

Rachel is left alone in her study after Joachim has gone to his Danish class. She steps back to observe her painting and carefully covers it with a linen cloth.

She can't really get used to her new situation. How should she react to a man who has suddenly fallen into her everyday life and been presented as her future husband? It was only a month ago that she was called in to her mother and received the news that there was a man on the way who she was going to marry. How wonderful it was that he was a Jewish man of good repute, German-speaking, and well educated in trade and money matters. He was even a Sephardim and, as a member of the Portuguese branch of Judaism, was able to settle in Denmark without any major obstacles.

"And think," the mother had continued, "you both can live in this house and take care of me in my old age."

Her whole life had already been arranged. No one had asked her what she thought. Rachel had not been impressed and had stormed out of the room. It was disrespectful, but she couldn't listen to anymore.

What about my art, she thinks, as she stands alone and a little lost in her studio. Should I just sit here and sew and occasionally give birth to children while he has most of his life outside the home? There is no one at the Academy of Fine Arts who cares about female painters. We're not even allowed entry! She stomps on the floor angrily. There is no way around it, she thinks sadly. Strange that they both lost their fathers at a young age, but that doesn't make things any easier. It seems to her that he is also a little uncomfortable with the situation. Her only consolation right now is that he is well educated and at least has the prospect of being able to converse with both her mother and her.

To calm her anger, she visits her best friend Miriam who, like herself, is not married but who is a little older and lives on her own in an apartment in *Nyboder*. Rachel hurries down *Bredgade*. The air is cold, and the wind persists, but she is still angry and doesn't think much about the cold. Luckily, Miriam is home, and together they decide on a little excursion. They walk together along the street. They quickly walk to, and pass, the bastions at the Citadel. A couple of soldiers in sparkling new uniforms send charming smiles to the two young ladies as they pass *Østerport*, smiles that Rachel ignores, but Miriam reciprocates. The two young women have been friends since childhood, and Rachel knows that she can confide in Miriam about all her worries. She turns her face to her friend.

"How is everything going to go for me if I marry a man I don't know at all? I have absolutely no experience in housekeeping. Not to mention the romantic side, which does not appeal to me at all, at least not with a completely unknown man. Can you tell me that, Miriam?"

"You don't realize it, Rachel, but you're actually very lucky." Miriam takes Rachel's arm. "This man, your new future husband, probably knows as little about the mysteries of love as you do. Moreover, the marriage is not planned until spring, and in the meantime, you can get to know each other better. You see, it'll be fine."

When the weather suddenly changes to threatening clouds and a cold, pungent rain comes to meet them, they turn around to walk back through the gate and into the city. They find shelter in a small café within the ramparts. A waiter serves tea and cookies, which they enjoy while wiping the rain off their clothes and finding the warmth of a stove in the corner of the room. Miriam tries to comfort Rachel.

"Maybe I can help you a little, dear. Although I don't have much experience in the rules of marriage, my blessed mother has often told me that marriage doesn't necessarily have much to do with love. It's more about friendship." Miriam sips her tea while she explains.

"It's more about friendship between two people, Rachel. If you can learn to be good friends, the rest will probably come by itself, and maybe you will even find that much-discussed love."

Rachel has her own thoughts on this. She knows that Miriam has lovers and doesn't care at all about stable relationships or what people think of her. She lives alone in the small apartment in *Nyboder* and is happy to be unmarried, something Rachel is both a little envious of, but also finds a little outrageous. She knows that Miriam, with her twenty years and good looks, would be a great gain for any man looking for a beautiful wife. Yet Miriam has chosen to be a free woman, which has made her a little unpopular in the synagogue and in the wealthy Jewish families who would like to see their sons married to a beautiful Jewish woman and would not care for an independent woman living on her own and has chosen a different life.

Rachel looks over the edge of her teacup and gazes at the friend sitting across from her. She is always dressed simply - a long, red cotton dress that is open at the neck. Her shoulders are covered with a finely embroidered shawl, which is joined with a brooch at the dress neckline. Her bosom is full, but her waist is narrow. Her face, wreathed with jet black hair, has a dark glow. Likewise, her fine, dark eyebrows curve symmetrically around her watchful and engaged gaze. Most of all, Rachel is a little jealous of her lips, which are so shapely and only rarely hide her white teeth.

If only I looked like her, she thinks, although she doesn't need to at all.

"Thank you for your wisdom, dear friend," she finally says. "Your words give me more courage. I'm still so confused, but your words give me comfort. I just had an idea."

It has become hot in the little room, and Rachel wipes some beads of sweat from her forehead with a small handkerchief. The waiter stands in the doorway, hoping that the ladies will order more cakes.

"Would you please come to the dinner my mother has planned for tomorrow? Then you can meet Joachim and see with your own eyes what kind of person he is."

"Thank you, I would love to," Miriam replies happily. The two women sit silently for a while as they look out at the street where people are running by, searching for a doorway where they can find shelter from the rain.

It is quite a surprise to Joachim that Madam Phromcke wants to throw a dinner party so soon after his arrival to the family, but Rachel often seems to have the upper hand over her mother and to get her way. Joachim now lives completely on the family's terms and at the beginning of his stay must merely say yes and no to the family's decisions.

The day after the Danish lesson, he decides to go exploring in Copenhagen.

He soon discovers that the city is very different from Schwerin. It is much larger and full of people who speak a language that is at present completely incomprehensible to him. Although most well-educated people also speak German, Danish is clearly what is spoken by the majority. The city also has completely different smells, which he experiences for the first time. The wind from the Baltic Sea is salty, the crowded streets are full of trash and the stench of too many people crammed behind the ramparts. On his walk through the streets, he comes down to *Gammel Strand*, where the sailing ships docked in the old days when they came in from the sea. Now there is a canal full of small fishing boats, and up the street the fishermen's wives sit early in the morning and peddle the men's catches. These have been brought in from the many fishing villages along the coast north of the town. As soon as Joachim approaches the canal, a woman shouts out to him.

"Young man, how about a fresh flounder for dinner?"

She is interrupted by another fisherman's wife, who shouts even louder.

"No, you there, her fish is from the day before yesterday, buy mine instead!" She lets out a scratchy laugh.

Joachim hurries to move on before their eagerness to sell degenerates into major quarreling. Much later, he learns that it is not unusual for these sales arguments and attempts at persuasion to degenerate into outright fights among the fishermen's wives, and that the police must be called in to calm their tempers.

He skirts across *Højbro Plads* and up through the streets to *Lille Kongensgade*, where he finds an eatery called Nr. 4. It's not very classy, but he's hungry and a little tired of wandering around at random. There are a couple of coachmen playing cards. Their black clothes almost look like Joachim's, but they are not Jews. They glance suspiciously at him, not with hostility, but neither were they friendly.

Joachim gets a couple of salted herrings served with dark bread and a mug of frothy beer. *Life is good*, he thinks, *I'm here to stay, to marry Rachel and create a future for myself in this big city.*

After satisfying his hunger, he heads back towards his new home but loses his bearings and wanders around lost for an hour or so before suddenly finding himself down at *Gammel Strand* again. He walks along the canal, and, for the first time, he sees the stock exchange building with its twisting spire. He stops, impressed, but then remembers that he shouldn't get back too late to change clothes before dinner. There will probably be other guests coming and it is rude not to be presentable and on time. He meets several businessmen who rush past, preoccupied with their own little lives. He tries unsuccessfully to catch their attention, but most just look straight ahead and don't meet his gaze. Finally, after asking several gentlemen who look as if they are educated people who might be able to understand German, an elderly gentleman takes pity on him and tells him how he can find his way back to *Skindergade*.

Joachim knows that there is no time to waste and sets off running. He notices that some people are looking in amazement at this slender Jew who, with a fur hat, long overcoat and beard fluttering in the wind, is dashing down the street. At that moment, he can't help but consider taking on a more understated Jewish appearance; he decides to shave off his beard as soon as possible so that he no longer has to look so different. *My goodness*, he thinks, *what would my mother say?*

Joachim finds the address on *Skindergade* after running frantically across the cobbled streets. First, he goes into the kitchen to warm himself by the fireplace. Alma has just finished with dinner preparations and takes a roast from the hook, which hangs sizzling over the fire, and places it on the butcher's block. She asks him something in Danish. Joachim doesn't understand it but just nods and smiles. From the living room, he can hear laughter. It sounds like Rachel is talking to another woman. Probably this friend she has casually mentioned in the past. He apologizes to the maid and goes up the stairs to his room, where he replaces his sweaty coat with a more appropriate dinner attire. White shirt with the collar tied together with a silk scarf, dark vest and black, half-length cotton jacket: his only other set of clothes.

In the meantime, the voices of Madam Phromcke and Mr. Cohen sound on the stairs leading down to the street.

Why on earth has she invited him? Joachim thinks as he walks down the stairs to the first floor. Here he encounters Rachel and her friend. Rachel addresses Joachim in German.

"May I introduce you to my best friend, Miss Miriam Andrade. She also speaks German, although like me she prefers Danish, but you're learning that, aren't you?"

Joachim snaps his heels together, bowing deeply. She holds out a hand that smells faintly of rose oil. He, kisses it ceremoniously, adding, "*Es freut mich Sie kennen zu lernen.*"⁶ She sends him a coquettish smile and turns to Rachel.

"Very charming," she says, laughing.

Miriam and Rachel have been friends for many years. Miriam's father, Benjamin Andrade, had worked his way up to captain in the navy due to his skill despite his Jewish descent. Unfortunately, when she was only twenty years old, he was accidentally killed while sailing to the Faroe Islands, where a strong wave in a storm washed him overboard. Because of his position, Miriam had been allowed to stay in *Nyboder*. Her mother, when she was very young, had wasted away due to a breast disease.

Her father had been completely alone in raising her, and this had made her a very independent woman who certainly did not want to get married, even though it was the most natural thing to do, in accordance with the spirit of the times.

She had a bright mind, a nice appearance, and an infectious laugh. Now she lived on her father's pension alone in the little apartment, and to everyone's astonishment was very satisfied with life.

Joachim can't stop thinking: *Here are two young women standing in front of me, one more beautiful than the other, but it's the less beautiful one I'm going to marry.* The blood rises to his head because of his thoughts, leaving a visible blush. Fortunately, Joachim is helped out of the situation by Mr. Cohen's arrival. Alma leads him up the stairs, and after a great deal of bowing and curtsying, the whole party goes into the dining room. Joachim notices with satisfaction that Miriam follows him with her eyes.

Is she perhaps considering whether he is worthy of her friend, or is it because she likes him? He can't venture a guess.

The table in the dining room is covered with the finest porcelain, crystal, and polished silverware next to the plates. Joachim is seated opposite Rachel, Mr. Cohen next to Madam Phromcke, and Miriam next to Joachim.

"Will you please say the blessing of the food, Mr. Behrend?" asks the hostess.

"Yes, of course." Joachim clears his throat and says in Hebrew:

*"Baruch ata Adonai Elobeinu Melech ha-olam ha-motzi-lechem min ha'ar-et."*⁷

⁶ "I am pleased to meet you." (formal address) [German].

⁷ "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." [Hebrew]