

Epilogue. The Call Out

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

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Epilogue

The Call Out

Hirshel Koffler, twenty-two, and his brother Yigel, twenty-four, had only been in America six weeks when they were hired on as brakemen for the Pennsylvania Railroad freight train known as the Tanker Toad, which shuttled coal from Berwyn, Pa., to the Pennhurst hospital. For these two former Austrian railroad men, Jewish refugees, America was a land full of surprises. There was the language, of course—incomprehensible. Then there was the food, nonkosher and sometimes delicious. And finally, the grinding, churning smoke of the great factories as people moved about the towns and cities in large numbers. But nothing they'd experienced in those first weeks was as strange as the scenario they found themselves in that Memorial Day weekend in 1936: staring at a tall, lanky Negro seated in the corner of their empty box car cradling a weeping child in his arms as their freight train rolled out of Pennhurst toward Berwyn. In a land of surprises and mysteries, this one was a topper.

They did not speak to the man, for their orders from the union boss, Uri Guzinski, had been clear. Uri was a fellow Yid, also a railman, from Poland, who'd been in America seventeen months, and while Uri was terse and his English was not great—though he spoke it better than the two brothers combined—Uri always showed them kindness. He even gave them his lunchbox that morning, since today was some kind of strange American holiday and the kosher store near their Berwyn flophouse was closed. “Memorial Day,” Uri had called it. Memorial for what? they wondered. Still, they did not ask, for Uri's directions that morning as they stepped aboard their 5:20 a.m. train for their first run to Pennhurst had been explicit and in Yiddish: “Put the Negroes on the train and drop them at Berwyn and hand them over to a Pullman.”

Neither Hirshel nor Yigel had any idea what a Pullman was and were afraid to ask. Nor were they sure what he meant by “lunchbox,” for he'd uttered that word in English. Still, Uri was the boss. So as the Tanker Toad slowly churned into the Berwyn yard at 6:05 on schedule, and as dawn crested over the glorious Pennsylvania sky, the two anxiously looked up at the signal tower window for Uri and spotted him nodding at two tall, impeccably dressed Negroes in white shirts, ties, shined shoes, and distinct Pullman porter hats who were standing at the far end of the freight yard. The two Negroes strode to the freight car, handed Hirshel and Yigel an envelope without a word, took one furtive glance about, then hustled the tall Negro and the youngster across the rails to the nearby passenger terminal, where the 6:14 Sandy Hill was steaming up to make its run to

Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

The two had no idea who those two passengers were, and they would never know, but when they opened the envelope, they found forty dollars for their "union job" and a note bearing the words "Come see me about your free new shoes." It was signed "M. Skrup," who had a Pottstown address. As they watched the train pull away, Yigel, holding the lunchbox, said to his brother in Yiddish, "Remember that minyan?"

"Which one?"

"The one in Pottstown. At the shul. Where they fought about the frog in the mikvah?"

Hirshel chuckled and nodded.

"You think this gift comes from that?" Yigel asked.

Hirshel shrugged. "Why would it?"

"They spoke of Negroes there."

Hirshel waved his hand in dismissal. "Don't be stupid. There are thousands of Negroes in this country, Yigel. Why would this money come from that?"

But that, too, was one of the many wonders of America. For the gift did come indirectly from the minyan at that shul. The promise of shoes, of course, came from Marv Skrupskelis, whose twin brother, Irv, was at that meeting. The money came from Moshe's cousin Isaac, who placed it in the hands of Bernice, who placed it in the hands of Fatty, who placed it in the hands of Nate's wife, Addie, who passed it to her husband, who placed a bit of it in the hands of Paper, who took that bit to two of her Pullman porter friends, who arranged with Uri to meet the two and ferry them along, from one Pullman porter crew to the next, from Berwyn to Philadelphia first, then to the General Lee, a southbound express train inside a first-class Pullman sleeper car to ride back to Charleston, S.C. The Low Country. Nate's home.

Nate would never see Addie again. He felt sure of it. And as the train made its way south out of Philadelphia, Nate resolved himself to it. He did not deserve what she had to give. But fortitude and love's reason have many a season, and one day she would return to him. He did not believe it then. As far as he knew, he was the last of the Loves. There would be no more. As for Dodo, the memory of Uncle Nate's arms cradling him, lifting him out of bed in the ward and carrying him through the basement, the bumpy cart ride to the open air of freedom, the feeling of being lifted into the arms of the two Jewish brakemen who handled him with the gentleness of an infant as Uncle Nate clambered aboard the freight car, that would be forgotten. As would the train ride all the way to Charleston—in a first-class sleeper with Pullman porters dotting on him the whole way, feeding him rice, ham, chicken, cake, and ice cream, as much as he wanted. All that, too, would be forgotten. For the haze of drugs took weeks to fade, and the memories of Pennhurst and the sad events that put him there bore the boom of howitzers blowing off in his brain, which, given his disability, would not have bothered him so much. For the fact is, after Pennhurst, he was done with sound. He didn't need it. He had his own sound now. It was sound sung to him as the sight, smell, and feel of the beautiful Low Country. And as the years passed on his South Carolina farm—bought with three hundred dollars, care of a Philadelphia Jewish theater owner named Isaac, who would one day with his cousin Moshe and several other Jewish theater owners create a camp in the Pennsylvania mountains for disabled children like him called Camp Chona, a camp that lasted long after every one of

those Jewish immigrants had died—the boy became a man who raised crops and milked cows and attended church three times a week; a man who learned how to “shout dance” without crossing his legs; a man who taught his children how to patch a roof, and cane a chair, and boil meat in iron pots, and wander through Spanish moss in summer; a man who watched his children learn from their great-uncle Nate how to build a horse-drawn mill to grind sugar cane, and from their great-aunt Addie how to thresh rice and grind meal, and from his beloved wife how to grow azaleas and his favorite, sunflowers—sunflowers of all colors and sizes. All life in Pennsylvania was erased in his mind and his heart and his memory.

Still . . .

As hard as he tried, he could not erase the memory of the woman with the shining black hair, sparkling eyes, easy laugh, and magic marbles; he could not forget the friend who thrust his finger out and held it in the dark like a beacon, all night till the sun came up. The memory of that finger, that one solitary white finger, reaching out in friendship and solidarity, shone in his memory like a bright, shining star. The memory lasted until the end of his full and very fruitful life, so that when he died, he was not Dodo of Pottstown but rather Nate Love II, the father of three boys and two girls. Nate was not the very last Love after all. There would be more. They surrounded him as he died, his children and their children. He died on June 22, 1972, the same day Hurricane Agnes wiped much of Pottstown off the face of the earth and a day after an old Jew named Malachi the Magician vanished forever from the hills of southeastern Pennsylvania.

And as he faded to eternal slumber, surrounded by loved ones, just feet from the sunflowers and summer moss that had helped wipe away the tumult of his first twelve years of life, he would offer four words in his final murmurings that were forever a puzzle to all that knew and loved him and surrounded him in his final moments of life, save for one who was not there, who was far beyond them all, now living in the land where the lame walked