Chapter 7

Vöslau

AFTER WORLD WAR I, I decided not to practice or live in a large city like Vienna. [The events described in this chapter were contemporaneous with those recounted in the previous chapter, but Moreno preferred to describe them separately.] I wanted to go into the countryside and practice among plain people. I got on a train one day. The first stop was Kottingbrunn, a small village near Vienna, but very much a country village, not a suburban town. I left the train and walked to the town hall. I introduced myself as Dr. Moreno and was informed that the town needed a health officer. I took the job. It was as simple as that.

I got to Vöslau because I went hiking. Only a few kilometers separated Kottingbrunn and Vöslau. I was out for a little fresh air and I wanted to get to know the countryside. There, on the main street of Vöslau, I met a middle-aged man who stopped me and spoke to me in a friendly way. I never found out why he approached me, although we were to become very good friends later. He introduced himself, "I am the mayor of Vöslau. I am Mayor Peksa."

I responded with astonishment, "My God, isn't that wonderful! I am very lucky to meet such an important person. It gives me great pleasure to become acquainted with you, Mayor Peksa."

He asked, "And who are you?"

I introduced myself, "I am a physician, the officer of health at Kottingbrunn. My name is Moreno."

Mayor Peksa became excited. He said, "I'll tell you, Dr. Moreno, why don't you come to us? We need a health officer very badly. Dr. Fuchs just died. We need a new man."

"I would be only too glad to come to Vöslau," I replied. "I could be health officer of both towns, Kottingbrunn and Vöslau. I have only been at Kottingbrunn for two months, you see."

"No," he said. "We want to have you just for us alone." Peksa was a simple working man. It was the first time in the history of Vöslau that a working man had become mayor. All the other mayors had been people of

means, bankers, businessmen, lawyers, and so on. Peksa wanted to do something for the working class, and he was proud to have found a doctor for the working people. He said, "Next week the town council meets and I will propose that we hire you as our public health officer, as our doctor."

"Oh, God," I said, "that is almost like a miracle. Let us drink a glass of wine to celebrate the occasion."

When my appointment was ratified the following week, I moved to Vöslau. The town gave me the use of a house in the Valley of May. The House of May was of stone, rather like a small castle, with a tower. A long veranda, overlooking the valley, ran across the whole back of the house. There was also an enormous wine cellar, the largest in town, which ran under the house and was carved out of the ground around the house as well. The house was surrounded by trees. Another house, across the road, was also given for my use, but I had no need of two houses.

It was the custom for the public health officer of the town to be appointed chief physician at the Kamgarn Spinnerei, a large textile factory in town. The town supplied housing, the factory, a salary. So I was well taken care of.

Many extraordinary things happened to me in Vöslau which explain how it happened that I became the People's Doctor. I went to the farthest extreme with the idea of anonymity. In Vöslau, I was just known as the Doctor. I had no shingle on my door, nor did I have prescription blanks, although this had some troublesome consequences for me later. I did not tell anyone my name. The mayor and the council knew my name, but they were appreciative of my desire for anonymity and went along with it.

I had a fixed idea that it was not fair to take money from patients, and so I never accepted any from those who came to see me privately. That, I believed, accounted for my popularity. I had more patients than I could treat. People came from all the villages around Vöslau, even from far away, peasants, men, women, children. When they came, they did not come empty-handed. They brought eggs and hens and geese, and once in a while, a pig. They brought all kinds of gifts.

I had a wonderful housekeeper then, Frau Frank, an elderly widow from Kottingbrunn. She argued with me, "Doctor, why don't you take money?"

"Why?" I answered. "I have a good salary. I have a house. I have no family to support."

"No, no. It isn't right. People expect to pay you for your work. You should accept fees." But I would not, and the gratitude of the people was limitless. So they kept on bringing all kinds of gifts, which they presented to Frau Frank. They brought clothing. They brought foodstuffs. I paid little attention to the gifts, but in the course of time, the house and the wine

cellar became crowded like a department store. Often it was embarrassing when important or well-to-do, even wealthy, patients came to see me with their maladies. The mayors of Wiener Neustadt and Sankt Pölten came to see me, but I would never accept money from anyone.

Once an old peasant came with a young girl. He said to me, "Dear Doctor, a number of years ago you cured me of cancer of the stomach. You saved my life. As a token of gratitude, I bring my little daughter to you as a gift. Here she is."

I looked at the girl. She was about 16 or 17 years old, and her father seemed to think that I might consider marrying his daughter. I replied to him, "I thank you, but I cannot accept your gift. I am deeply moved by your enormous gratitude, so great that you offer me your only daughter to be my wife. However, I believe the best thing you can do is to take your daughter home and wait until she is of age."

"I understand," the man said, and left me.

One night, I heard some strange noises coming from the upper floor of the house, where Frau Frank lived. I went upstairs and listened at the door of her room, wondering what the noise could be. I opened the door and saw huge piles of gulden, gulden, gulden.

"What is going on here?" I asked.

"Dear Doctor," she answered me, and I noticed that she was in tears. "When I saw how hard you work and that you would not accept any money, and when at the same time, I saw all these wonderful gifts coming in, I decided to barter some and sell the rest for money. In your old age, when you can't work any more, you will have a nest egg. All this money is yours."

I was astounded but could not do anything except appreciate her kindness and thoughtfulness. . . .

When I went to Vöslau, I became a celibate again. The Godplayer was again ascendent. The intense sexuality I had felt and experienced during the war was put behind me. All of the lovely, gentle young women I had relationships with had never entered into my real, my very complicated lovelife. They did not touch my life as a Godplayer. I had gone through periods of intense sexual activity followed by periods of celibacy before. But what I really wanted was a woman who would put up with my fantastic utopian ideas, one who would love me both physically and spiritually, a Muse. . . .

I saw Marian for the first time walking through the valley with a group of children. She was about 18 or 19, very blonde, blue-eyed, about 5 feet 5, rather slender, very self-possessed, but, at the same time, rather suggestible. She was a school teacher.

I didn't touch her. She didn't touch me. I loved her with my eyes, in my

dreams. And I imagined that she did the same in return. There was never a courtship between us. . . .

The day I heard of Frau Frank's death [while she was out of town visiting her sister], Marian walked into my office. She had seen me professionally several times for a minor throat condition. She, too, had just heard about Frau Frank's death and offered to come and help me out for a couple of hours every day. After a week, the 2 hours became 4. After another few weeks, she came early in the morning and stayed all day. One day she gave up teaching, left the home of her parents, and came to live with me in the House of May. She became my platonic lover and my spiritual partner.

Our relationship confused the townspeople. They did not know what to make of us. How could such a saintly man who was a gentle doer of good deeds suddenly turn into a sensuous lover? Our relationship was so genuinely innocent at that time that it was perfectly simple for us to go about as if there were nothing at all unusual in our being together. Marian's parents defended us to the utmost, saying that it was perfectly natural. The doctor needed a housekeeper and was happy to have one who was so young and beautiful, but there was nothing at all suspicious going on between us. My partisans said that only dirty minds would think otherwise, but there were plenty of dirty minds in town. . . .

One of the most significant aspects of my Godplaying was the way it reflected itself in my sexual life. I lived with Marian for months, even slept with her, without having any sexual contact with her. I had no desire for sex. The stronger my desire for Godplaying was, the weaker was my desire for sex. There was, therefore, in my case, a negative correlation between sex and God in that particular period. My case was probably more than personal. It seems to be a universal phenomenon. The Godplayers in the Bible, for instance, Jesus, who certainly was a great lover in the spiritual sense, was hardly interested in sex: the story of Mary Magdalene speaks for itself. When one begins to play God, one loses the desire for natural copulation. One becomes quasi-impotent; the mystery of celibacy is closely related to it. God (or those who aspire to become God) does not permit the flesh to dominate Him. . . .

I have tried to define my relationship with Marian. In the beginning, the effort resulted in spelling out what kind of relationship it was *not*. . . . Our relationship was not the ordinary kind, like two people who fall in love, have an affair, and break up after the period of infatuation is over. The relationship was not sexually enforced, although sex eventually played a part in it. We met and were immediately devoted to one another. Sexual devotion emerged after a long while; it was always secondary to the relationship.

Neither were we like two people who meet, fall in love, and marry in order to have children and establish a family. There was no legal enforce-

ment of our relationship. We made a free decision, she and I, although the decision was never expressed in so many words or dramatically formulated.

If it was neither infatuation or conventional love, nor religious, legal, or social force, what was the element which kept us together? I think it can be best expressed as a relationship which was based on mutual faith. People who are tied together by acts of faith are not tied together by any promise or hope that what they have built together will endure forever. Such is the embodiment of ultimate devotion; one knows intuitively that one can depend on the other, that life and death cannot hinder the existence of that devotion. It exists and will exist as long as the two people last, whether they remain together or not.

I believe that this kind of relationship is extremely modern, ultramodern. It has a global and even a cosmic meaning. It exists everywhere in varying forms. For all its modernity, it has existed as far back as human history goes, although it may never have been as independent from custom and social ties, religion, and moral codes as it is in our time. It is possible that this precious form of relation won't last and will be destroyed by man's terrific urge to put everything within frameworks which are easily controllable. . . .

I met Marian quite casually. She never introduced me to her parents, and I never introduced any of my relatives to her. Our bond was strictly between ourselves. There was no bondage between us, no minister or priest, no mother, father, or friend. We spoke the same language, and we were both young. There may have been some esthetic element in our attraction to one another. For months, I did not know where she came from, whether she was rich or poor, German, Czech, or Hungarian. She did not know whether I was Jew or Gentile, Italian, or Spanish. These factors did not seem relevant to our relationship. Later, when I found out that she was a Gentile of predominantly German origin, my imagination was flattered. In my early youth, I was more attracted to Gentile women than to Jewish women. But considerations of race or religion were tangential to us. . . .

A social revolution was raging in Austria in 1918. Vöslau was the only town in Austria which was, for a period of 3 days, a Soviet, having been taken over by the Workers' Council. Bela Kuhn's communist government in nearby Hungary had been sending out revolutionary shock waves all over *Mittel Europa* at the time. The majority of the city council were, when I arrived, manual laborers, working men with a leftist, socialistic bias.

Aside from our mutual good feelings, Mayor Peksa saw in me an opportunity to consolidate his political position, and my election as health officer was a clever piece of strategy on his part against bourgeois suppression. He was proud to have me as his friend, a doctor who treated him as

an equal. My election as health officer was revolutionary in another way. It was the first time that a Jew had been appointed to what had always been a post reserved for Gentiles. It had also been reserved for doctors who presented the picture of the complete bourgeois gentleman, a man set apart from the plain people. There were hardly any Jews living in the town, although many Jewish people came to the spa in the summertime. My detractors said that I had hypnotized the mayor into nominating me as health officer. . . .

My passion for anonymity reached its peak at this time. . . . I thought that the simplest way for a doctor to keep out of mischief was to be anonymous. By avoiding the possibility of fame, he could not draw patients from other doctors. A name is a form of capital that lends itself to advertising and exploitation.

But it didn't work out quite as I had planned. My anonymity provided me with a certain glamour. The more I tried to retreat, the more people followed me. I became the *Wunderdoktor.* Naturally, the other doctors around became jealous and restless. They spread the tale that I was not a real doctor. I was a quack. But the University of Vienna promptly acknowledged that I had received my degree in February 1917. If I had planned to become famous, I could not have devised a better scheme. So the episode ended in paradox: the more I clung to anonymity, the more widely known I became. And we have already seen how my effort to treat the poor and not take money was thwarted.

Late one night, the doorbell rang with a shrill sound, as it has often been told in the tales of witches. I heard my old housekeeper [Moreno is referring to an earlier event] tapping down the stairway and slowly opening the door with its heavy key. "There must be some very sick person coming to see the doctor," she said. Then she rushed into me with an unusual expression on her face.

"What is it?"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "a big carriage is downstairs, drawn by four white horses, or maybe six. The Bürgermeister of Mödling is very sick. He is dying. There are two ladies in the carriage, his wife and sister. They want you. All the other doctors have seen him. No one was able to help. You are their last hope. You must come right away."

I had never treated the Bürgermeister of such a large city. I looked out the window. Yes, there was a carriage outside. The snow was falling in heavy flakes. I walked through the door and saw the two ladies in heavy, dark furs. They looked straight at me. They were sitting in the carriage and made space for me. They looked at me with an air of disappointment. Then they looked at one another. Back to me again, then to each other. They whispered one to the other. I stroked my face and chin and suddenly

a flash of insight came to me. I realized how young I must look to them, barely out of medical school. They expected the Wunderdoktor to be an elderly man, experienced and wise. I knew I had to act fast. "Oh," I said, "I am sorry, but my father could not come tonight; he is very, very busy. But I am his son. He gave me all the prescriptions and told me what to do."

Their faces brightened. "Oh, yes," they whispered to each other, "the father is very busy; that is his son; he has been told what to do." They gave the coachman a signal to start the carriage. After a while we arrived in Mödling. The square before the Bürgermeister's house was crowded with mourners. Hundreds stood there. The Bürgermeister was well loved in the city. As the carriage passed through the crowd, the Bürgermeister's wife and sister passed remarks to the people waiting there and murmurs spread rapidly through the throng. "The father is very, very busy. He could not come. He has sent his son. The old man has told him what to do." Soon I stood before the bed in which the dying man lay, stricken with anguish, breathing heavily. The man's wife moved swiftly to the bedside. "The father is so busy. He could not come," she whispered to her husband. "But he has sent his son and told him what to do. He will help you." The Bürgermeister looked up and smiled. I examined him and gave him the medication he required. He was suffering from pneumonia and heart trouble.

The Bürgermeister recovered for the time being. It was like a miracle! The tale began to spread over the city and to the villages near and far. "There is, in Vöslau, a Wunderdoktor." But they added, "there are two, a father and a son. The father is very, very busy. When he cannot come, he sends his son." My fame had reached the hearts of the people and they began to come from far places to see me. I had more to do than one man could ever handle.

On another winter night, cold, and late, well after midnight, I was sitting at my desk when the doorbell shrilled. Frau Frank rushed in. "It is the Bürgermeister of Sankt Pölten. He is in great pain. He wants to see you." Sankt Pölten was two or three times larger than Mödling. It was a long way from Sankt Pölten to Vöslau, so the Bürgermeister had come in person for treatment. He was a big man. He had hardly described his troubles when he exclaimed, "But I am telling you, I did not come to see you. I need the best! I want to see the old man himself! Where is your father?"

"Oh," I responded. "He is very, very busy. You will have to wait a long time. He has so many patients scheduled before you."

"I must see him. I must. Where is his office?"

"Well," I said pensively, "he may be in one of the offices upstairs. Follow me." We went up to the first floor. We looked into all the rooms. He was not there. We went up to the second floor. We looked into all the rooms. He was not there. We went up to the third floor. We looked into all

the rooms. He was not there either. The Bürgermeister looked at me questioningly. "Well, this is the last floor. We may go up still higher, though. Follow me." There we were, standing on the roof. Above us was the clear, dark winter sky, filled with stars. He looked at me as if to say, "Where do we go from here?" I looked into his eyes, then pointed to the sky above. "Maybe he has his office there."

The Bürgermeister was deeply moved. He took my hand. "I understand," he said. "The Father is very busy."

There were many such episodes that helped me hold to my dream that I was, indeed, God. . . .

Marian had been very close to the German nationalist societies in town. At one time, she had been the secretary of one of the more radical groups. No one really knew my exact ancestry, but it began to be thought that I was Jewish. As the gossip spread, two opinions began to spread about me. One was that, even if I was a Jew, I did not look like one, that my name was not Jewish, and that I did not mingle with Jewish people. Thus I was absolved of having been born a Jew. The other opinion was that a Jew is a Jew no matter what, and that it was an outrage for a Jew to live openly with a young, beautiful German girl who had been held in the highest esteem of the townspeople before she had taken up with me. These people felt that I had mesmerized Marian or that I had exercised some kind of black magic upon her so as to make her leave her senses and live with me.

Both of these theories were underground and rarely came to the surface except for one incident. Marian and I were at the Baden railway station, coming home from a small excursion. Baden is a few miles north of Vöslau. We walked up and down the platform waiting for the train. A dozen men, mostly adolescent, all in the uniform of the German academic fraternities, extremely nationalistic proto-Nazi groups, were clustered on the platform.

Marian whispered to me, explaining who the men were. They all knew her, and she was anxious enough about their presence to caution me against them and try to move me away from a potentially tense situation.

But I would not avoid them. The men walked up and down, coming closer and closer to us, becoming more and more threatening in their looks and bearing. Suddenly one, apparently the leader, stopped in front of us. He snarled, "Jew," but before he could move away from me, I punched him. He fell on the ground. Marian trembled and held my arm tightly. The man got up. I looked into his eyes and then looked into the eyes of his comrades who had crowded around us. I looked at them with all the intensity I could muster. I measured them with my eyes. Under the charismatic spell I cast—that is the only way I can explain it—they moved on without saying a word. At that moment, the train came into the station.

This rather trivial incident became important for two reasons. On one hand, I pictured myself, for a moment, like Moses, who knocked down an Egyptian slave master because he insulted one of Moses's kinsmen. I felt that it was good to have stood up without fear against a crowd of men who could easily have slaughtered me. Whether the historical Moses was an Egyptian or a Jew is irrelevant. He became a Jew the moment he knocked down that Egyptian. In the same way, I became a Jew the moment I knocked down the Nazi. Obviously one is a Jew, a German, or a Frenchman only in moments of active identification with his heritage. No one is a Jew, a German, or a Frenchman *all the time.* Was it cowardice that held my enemy and his cohorts from retaliating against me? Was it a certain awe at the unexpectedness of my attack? Or fear? Was it the effect of my ethical power which made them halt before a superior man? Was it my status as the Wunderdoktor? Whatever it was, it was a strange incident with an unusual ending. . . .

The fact of my Jewishness may have been involved somewhat in my decision to be anonymous. It has been proverbial for Jews to hide their identity and change their names. The official character of my post in Vöslau and the political climate in which I had grown up and which continued to worsen for Jews gave me an excellent opportunity to live up to these Jewish attributes. I suppose I was reluctant to advertise the fact that I was a Jew. I wished to maintain a mysterious neutrality. I kept everyone guessing. The secrecy of my true identity became so intense in my mind that I myself began to wonder what my real identity and my real name were. I had been playing with my name for years, but the problem of my name *versus* my desire for anonymity arose in acute fashion when I started the existential journal, *Daimon.* I did not start with anonymity right away, but with something in between. First I changed my name around: from Jacques Levy to Jacob Levy, thus intensifying my Jewishness; then I added my father's middle name, Moreno, Jacob Moreno Levy; again later I turned it around and became J. L. Moreno. All of these subtle differences began to annoy me, and so I decided to drop my name altogether and became totally anonymous. . . .

At times it seemed to us that our lives were threatened. One could see and hear groups of nationalist students walking through the valley in the course of the night. They shouted at us and yelled slanderous insults. Often they stood before our door and sang nationalistic songs, looking up at the lighted windows, hoping to provoke us into acting against them. At times we heard shots in the valley and the air was filled with panic. It got to the point where Marian was afraid to walk through the valley, even in the daytime.

But our . . . tormentors did not remain quiet. They invaded public places

all over the district and engaged in all kinds of provocative behavior. Whenever I walked through the town alone, our enemies evaded me. There was no more eye-to-eye confrontation with them. Of course, I still had an enormous following in town. All the workers and their families were on my side, and they were, by far, the majority. Unknown to me, I was a symbol to the workingmen, their rallying point against the rich, the moneyed, the powerful people, the bankers and their cohorts. I was well protected against aggression. The little people in town knew better than I did the extent to which I was exposed to harm and [they] kept watch over me. But they did not feel protective towards Marian. She appeared to them to belong to the hated class and was reputed to have me in her clutches. To them, I was the innocent man of the people, and she was the witch. . . .

Had I not experienced the love of a Gentile woman for a Jewish man, the fight of a superior Jew against the prevailing mediocrity of German society at the time, that jealousy against me, and that desire for revenge, I might never have developed the intuition that I had to leave Europe in time to find a new haven in the United States. I was like a migratory bird who felt the cold winds of autumn long before they actually began to blow upon him.

From 1921 on, I urged my friends to leave Europe and prepare a new setting for our work in the United States, and in 1925, I followed them. As history proved, it was the right decision to make. Perhaps my motivation to emigrate was also on a higher plane than a purely personal concern for my physical safety and security. I had an enormous migratory urge in my very soul to engage in fantastic journeys into all the realms of the spirit, to find a new principle that was worthy for mankind to follow. . . .

Finally Marian and I did become lovers and consummated our relationship. Our physical relationship became a very intense one in which we were able to fuse the spiritual longings of the Godplayer and his muse with the purely physical sex that had been, for such a long time, irrelevant to my life. Our relationship deepened every time we were together. We expected to marry, although we talked about marriage very rarely. . . .

She followed me to Hamburg on the eve of my departure for the United States in February 1925. We had a night of love there that was unequaled in our entire previous relationship. I promised to send for her as soon as I was established in the United States. I fully intended to have her join me and we corresponded for a while. Some of her letters moved me deeply. "Whenever the new health officer drives by in his Mercedes, I cry." After several months, I stopped answering her letters. Somehow my feelings for her just died down as I became involved in an exciting new life. . . .