Drifting

The day I married Rosemary, my father killed me in his heart.

He had threatened, he had warned, had tried with fatherly embrace to dissuade. The skin of his hand was rumpled leather and printer's ink had burrowed under his nails. In his nearness, he smelled of paper and must.

'If you go through with it . . .'

He had never been a religious man, but at fifty-five acquired a reverence for symbol. Entering his home, he touched and kissed now the mezuzah he had earlier ignored. He hung a mizrach on the eastern wall, wore a skull-cap when he ate, and delicately, lovingly even, sipped from the silver kiddush cup that Mother had bought.

I went through with it.

'We finally made it, Bernie, didn't we?', Rosemary whispered when the ring was on her finger and the handshakes and kisses had done their round. On the steps outside the registry, she kissed me on the brow and her black cherry-scented hair brushed against my cheek.

'Are you happy?', I asked, holding her chin.

'Perfectly,' she said. Aren't you?'

'Yes,' I said.

Edward Merrilees, down from Mildura for his daughter's wedding, came up to us. 'You can call me Dad now, Son,' and Cynthia Merrilees, touching my arm, added, 'And I'm Mum.'

The November sun glowed as soft-edged ribbons of light

tumbled through the gathering clouds. People walked past and smiled. An elderly woman stopped to watch. Cars passed. A policeman blew his whistle.

My father was in his press, setting type.

On the way to Phillip Island, Rosemary sat close to me, her head upon my shoulder. I spoke about my father, remembering things I had earlier chosen to forget. – Like the number on his arm. Like his heart attack. Like his pain.

If Father ever floundered in his early days in the oceans of either disbelief or faith, he didn't let the slightest ripple betray. He swam in certainty, however far he allowed himself to drift.

Setting out from Europe, he possessed one overcoat, one watch and one book, a slender volume in Yiddish to which he cleaved throughout the voyage. Often he didn't come down for meals and Mother would carp:

'Itzchak, put away Shpinoza and come and eat!'

'But I *am* eating,' he would reply good-naturedly. 'Feasting even, at a banquet that is without end.'

And he would stay on deck to savour, to dine, to gorge again, while the salty sea-breeze flapped the pages and ruffled his hair.

Shpinoza. I liked the sound. It had about it something exotic and strangely musical. I sang it, twisted it with my lips, played quoits with it, said it harshly like my mother, uttered it delicately with Father's reverence for sacred things. Sometimes, he read to Mother as she embroidered her handkerchiefs, and I sat at the foot of his deck-chair, listening without comprehending, if only to hear Father say, 'Yes, yes, that is true,' or 'Shpinoza is a great man, but no, to this I can't agree.'

Father was a clever man.

But sometimes Mother was displeased. Especially when he spoke of God, about whom he and Spinoza disagreed.

'Not in front of the child,' she would admonish, lifting her

sea-blue eyes from her embroidery, and then say to me, 'Baruch'l, my precious, maybe you want to go down and get a roll?'

But Father, secure in the certainty in which he swam, would answer, 'Why shouldn't he know the truth? God *is* only an idea, created, nurtured and sustained by the human mind. After Auschwitz . . .'

'Itzchak,' Mother would plead again, more forcefully. 'Please, not in front of the child.'

He would shrug his shoulders, but have the final say. 'One day he will learn it for himself.'

My father's name was Issac, where his father's had been Abraham. And, following ancestral heritage, he might have named me Jacob had he not, at the time of my birth, been full with the spirit of Spinoza. He called me Baruch instead. But where that other Baruch, idol of his veneration, had outside the Law become known as Benedict, on Australian soil his son Baruch was transmuted into Bernard – which he avoided whenever he could.

'My clever Baruch'l,' he would call me, or 'my little Shpinoza' if I had been especially smart. But Bernard he left for the street, for documents, for some later time.

I was eleven then.

That slender Yiddish volume, dog-eared, ragged and stained, retained pride of place among the books with which Father crammed his shelves, long after he had drifted from that anchor that had been Shpinoza. I tried, in later years, to suck its juices and dine at the banquet where Father had feasted, but the lofty Yiddish, the complicated words, the tortuous sentences, all these passed undigested through my boyish brain. I leafed through his other books but these were no less elusive, and I despaired of ever understanding as I watched Father, his hair beginning to grey, reading in his chair, opening one volume and another, extracting, marking, underlining and annotating, through private and unremitting industry gathering sheafs of paper full with his close and spindly script, which he

stapled, bound and filed, taking them out when invited to lecture before the Kadimah, the Katzetler or the Lodzer Landsmanschaft.

'What good does all this do you?', Mother said once, bringing a cup of tea from the kitchen. I had followed her in. 'All day in the press, at night with your books. Is that living? You'll ruin your health. So what if, for a change you don't speak at the meetings?'

My father reached out to me and rummaged his fingers through my hair. Rings had appeared around his eyes and the greying bristles of his eyebrows seemed stiff. He had begun to smell of paper and must.

'Well, my little Shpinoza, and what do *you* say?'

He smiled at the helpless shrug of my shoulders.

'Do you know what Shpinoza would say? "The greatest good is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with all of nature." Knowledge, Baruch'l. There is so much to learn and so much to understand.' To Mother, he added, 'After Auschwitz, Rivke, everything that was said and written before has become all wrong.'

After I had turned Bar Mitzvah, Father often took me with him to his lectures. There were never many people present. Fifteen, twenty, on exceptional occasions even thirty. But he held them in thrall as – it seemed to me – he waded through depths mysterious and intriguing, and created ever-widening ripples around words and names that became through repetition increasingly familiar. The fluency with which he spoke about Europe, Israel, Hitler, God, the assurance that stamped each word on Asch and Peretz, Sholom Aleichem and Leivick, stirred in me, less a pride of the man who addressed the gathering – though pride in him was beyond denial – than a resurgent will to taste again of the delicacies that had made that man. It was at sixteen that I began really to read and to absorb those juices that had thus far eluded me.

I began to buy my own books, cheap second-hand copies I discovered at Hall's.

I devoured them eagerly. But Mother was worried.

'It's unnatural,' she said. 'A boy your age should be outside, in the sun, not filling his head with ideas. You're just like your father.'

'Come now, Rivke,' Father said, laughing, letting the creases play at the outer corners of his eyes 'let him be, he's not as bad as all that. A man is nothing but what he knows.'

And as he looked over my expanding shelves of books, taking down Zweig's Spinoza, Dostoievski, Chekhov, Tagore, he nodded with obvious satisfaction and sucked his lips. Only when he came across Russell's Essays did he waver momentarily and say, 'That's a bit radical for a young fellow, isn't it?', but added with his next breath, 'He does make sense just the same.'

Father's endorsement of Russell transformed flirtation into commitment. What Spinoza had been for Father, Russell became for me. In the years that followed, through matriculation and through university, I experimented with Heschel and Buber and Hirsch, and sought sustenance from the Tenach from which they had derived their source, but it was to Russell that I repeatedly returned, as it was towards Ecclasiastes, of all the Scriptures, that my natural inclinations leant, finding in their this-worldly earthiness a resonance that most closely approximated truth.

Father continued to lecture, but to an audience, I noticed, that steadily dwindled. He began to repeat himself and narrowed the scope of his themes to a preoccupation with the War, the Holocaust, and the relation of God to the Holocaust. His conclusion – that God had died in Auschwitz together with His people – was not a popular one; far less the corollary, that survival had no meaning, nor the deaths of the six million, beyond the actual physical facts themselves.

One evening, during a talk, he unbuttoned a sleeve and bared his arm, and pointing at the dull blue number engraved in skin, said, with a vehemence as uncharacteristic as it was fervid,

'God, if He were there, would not have let this be done to a man.'

The outward certainty with which he addressed his audience remained, but the persistence with which he belaboured the same set of themes betrayed – I sensed – the first signs that he might, in fact, be floundering in a swelling tide of self-doubt. People left the meetings unsatisfied. There was talk that Isaac Walshansky was becoming eccentric.

Meanwhile, at university, I had joined the Rationalist Society and, in time, became its chairman.

Mother, when I told her, bit her lips.

'Bernard, you're drifting away from us more and more,' she said. 'Don't you have any Jewish friends?'

'Some,' I answered, not without some truth, 'but we have little in common.'

Father looked up from the tea he was drinking. He seemed tired and ashen, as though he was driving himself too hard.

'Are you sure that the Society's principles are your own, Baruch?', he asked. He had stopped calling me his Spinoza long before.

'As certain as I can be,' I said, in fact totally convinced.

I was studying history and comparative literature at the time and my library, already substantial, continued to grow.

'I see you've relegated our own thinkers to a corner,' Father observed on one occasion.

I had indeed. Where Buber and Heschel and Rosenzweig had been, I had placed Russell and Huxley and Freud, and in place of Peretz and Asch, I had installed Beckett and Camus.

My circle of friends, too, progressively changed. As chairman of the Rationalist Society, my contacts broadened, bringing me to the notice of academics, post-graduate students, editors of journals, research staff. I whirled in a round of university parties, meetings, lectures and debates. I presented papers on 'Determinism and Chance' and 'The Dilemmas of Reason', and published articles, reviews, critiques.

When, in my honours year, I moved out of home, the physical act of moving was a mere formality. Apart from Sunday dinners, I was seldom home in the day. Mother resisted, protested and predicted the worst; while Father, who

seemed now to flicker where, once, he had throbbed, relented more easily but, echoing Mother, saw fit to warn,

'You're a grown man, Baruch. Go, if you wish . . . But don't bring home a shikse.'

He didn't laugh on this occasion. Instead, he fixed me with an unfaltering gaze, a gaze that sought out a promise, or some assurance, that I would not stray too far. His hair was prematurely white and a doughy flabbiness had set into his cheeks. He had begun to visit Dr. Benjamin about his sleeplessness.

Only long after I had met Rosemary did it occur to me that Father must have laboured under certain premonitions at the time.

I made no promise.

The following March, I began to tutor in literature and started work towards my Master's degree. In May, I met Rosemary and in August, she moved in with me. She had black hair and delicate lips and wore colours that were bright without being glaring. She brought with her a certain sprightliness and there hung about her the scent of cherries.

One day, Mother asked, 'You're not running around with shikses, are you?'

'I have all kinds of friends,' I answered.

Father merely asked whether I had read Elie Wiesel . . .

Father's health deteriorated. He spent more time before the television set and less with his papers and books. His lectures became infrequent, and in December, Dr. Benjamin discovered he had diabetes.

'There is only one law in this world,' Father said in a mock tone that issued out of his dejection. 'And that is – everything that lives runs to decay.'

Two months later, he suffered a heart attack.

The days he spent in Prince Henry's Hospital were black. Confined to bed, he armoured himself with a solid, inscrutable silence. Mother, thrust suddenly upon the rack of uncertainty, fretted and wept and wrung her hands. She brought Father the 'Jewish News' but it remained on his locker unopened and unread. Even as we sat beside him, he avoided speech, he

avoided touch, and turned his grey, melancholy, almost wounded eyes now upon the heart monitor and now upon the King's Domain where the white turret of Government House rose above the green unmoving crests of trees. Sometimes, moved by some inner prompting, he would sigh or raise an eyebrow or shrug a shoulder. But mostly he remained unreachable.

I spent much time looking at the number on his arm . . .

While Father was in hospital, I stayed with Mother. Rosemary minded the apartment to which I returned when Father came home.

Home again, something new, at first barely perceptible, enveloped Father. If he had, in the days following his heart attack, been frightened or bewildered by the glancing touch of death, he now breathed of a calm that plumbed his inner depths. He slept without pills, sat at ease behind his books, and began to glow again.

It was then that he acquired a reverence for symbol and ritual.

'I have been spared twice,' he said. 'And for that I can only be grateful.'

And out of gratitude, he nailed a mezuza to every door, made benedictions over the Sabbath wine, wore his skull-cap when he ate and walked to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

One Sunday, upon visiting my parents for dinner, I found him incinerating papers in the back-yard. It was early April. There were apples on the trees and the first issue of lemons was ripening. Father stood beside the incinerator feeding the flames, every so often bending back as a puff of wind blew thick smoke into his face. I started as I recognised the papers full with Father's close and spindly script.

Moving forward to salvage the files not yet consigned to fire, I exclaimed, 'But that's your life!'

Father grabbed my shoulder. He smiled, wryly, as he fed another sheaf of papers to the flames.

'Yes, Baruch. Wasted, wasn't it?'

Some six weeks into his convalescence, it occurred to him to

visit my flat. I was at a Rationalist meeting and Rosemary who had stayed behind to complete an essay, opened the door. He didn't stay. Instead, he turned on his heels, and without a second glance at Rosemary, hurried, almost stumbled down the stairs.

When I visited my parents again on the following Sunday, Mother greeted me first.

'You can still show your face? Do you know what you are doing to your father? Have you thought for one moment . . .?'

Father restrained her with an upraised palm.

'Don't shout,' he said to her as he turned to me. 'Baruch, tell me, is this what I lived through Auschwitz for? Is it? For my sake, give her up.'

His skin which had begun to shine again resumed the matted dullness of leather.

'But she's a lovely girl,' I said. 'You have only to meet her, to talk to her to see . . .'

'Apikoros!', Mother exclaimed, 'I knew this would happen!'

Father again motioned her not to shout.

'No, I will not meet her,' he said. 'Some things are more important. Your must know at all times what you are and what *they* are.'

'But I don't *believe*.'

'It isn't a question of belief, but if nothing else, then of respect.'

'I can't give her up now,' I said. 'It's too late. I wanted to bring her home. I wanted to tell you. We are planning to marry in November.'

'Aren't you ashamed?', Mother remonstrated.

Father fixed me with his gaze 'If you go through with it . . .' he began, but didn't finish. He adjusted his skull-cap and repeated, 'For my sake, Bernard.'

Where he had long before stopped calling me his Spinoza, he now disowned Baruch as well.

'They'll adjust,' I said to Rosemary. 'We're not the first in this situation.'

But my parents didn't adjust. Sunday dinners became more

strained and recriminatory. I invented excuses for avoiding them.

I continued to whirl in my own orbit. Rosemary and I prepared for the wedding. Despite my pleadings, my parents refused to meet her.

'Perhaps we *are* doing the wrong thing, Bernie,' Rosemary said.

'Whatever we do now will be the wrong thing,' I answered. 'They won't be reconciled.'

In the end, we made peace with facts. Ours would be a registry wedding, without a reception, without white dresses or flowers or bridesmaids. The Merrilees would drive down from Mildura; my parents would come if they changed their mind. A single photographer would take pictures and a party for friends would follow our return from Phillip Island.

'Hardly the wedding a girl dreams about, is it?', Rosemary said, brushing her lips against my cheek.

Mother still tried to change my mind, pleading at every opportunity. But Father, his eyes averted, said, 'I don't want to talk about it. He's a grown man. He knows his obligations.'

Neither wavered. On the evening before the wedding, I telephoned them.

Father answered.

'There is nothing to talk about,' he said. 'Until now you've been our son. If you go through with it . . .'

On the way to Phillip Island, Father's dry unemotional tone haunted, more tenaciously than Mother's heated shriller plaints. I stared at the road ahead and found it hard to speak.

'You don't regret it now, do you, Bernie?', Rosemary said, touching my cheek. With her hair drawn back by a crimson ribbon, she looked more alive, open, gay.

'Things might have been different, that's all.'

'If we had been accepted?'

'If we had been accepted. And yet the paradox is that, in a way, things couldn't have been different. It's being too harsh to expect them to accept.'

'That's an unexpected change.'

'It's just another way of looking at things. One would have to go back to some different beginning to understand, to a beginning starting not with us, Rosemary, nor even with my parents' coming to Australia, but further back still, generations, to a distant encounter of the Jew with Europe. And even then, the story is only a fraction told.'

Rosemary's gaze upon me, open and exploring, compelled me to continue.

'For the chairman of the Rationalist Society, this is an unusual admission to make, I know, but the truth is this: the history of the Jew is a chain and each generation a link along it. Do you realise what our marriage means, Rosemary? With me, one specific chain has come to an end, its continuity has been disrupted. And in a way it's . . . it's awesome.'

Rosemary kissed me on the ear, but I doubted if she really understood.

When we returned to Melbourne, I swallowed my pride and took Rosemary to my parents' home. She thought it unwise. But I had resolved to force them to meet her, something I should have done long before, but had repeatedly deferred.

It was Sunday afternoon and the weather was mild and faintly sunny.

Mother opened the door.

She had evidently considered such an encounter, for she visibly took control of herself, set her jaw firm and knotted her brow with a forced determination. Her hair lay in careless grey tangles, her eyes hardened to flint.

'Mother, this is Rosemary.'

'You may as well come in,' she said, sizing up Rosemary with one scanning glace.

'Was this the right time to come?', Rosemary whispered, nervously, as we entered the lounge-room.

'And when is the right time?', I asked in return, smiling and squeezing her hand.

There were fruit and nuts on the coffee-table and one of

Father's books in a chair. The room smelled of polish and, strangely, of aniseed. On the dinner table lay Father's open Tenach.

'Your father's out walking,' Mother said, intercepting my gaze.

'How is he?'

'God protects.'

She wore a chequered apron and her hands were moist and white and wrinkled from laundering clothes. Following us into the lounge-room, she made minimal fuss over her appearance. She merely dried her hands, brushed away some recalcitrant strands of hair and with a corner of her damp apron wiped her brow, asserting, although without words, that whatever happened in her household, the daily chores of living had to go on. Yielding to the habits of hospitality, she pushed towards us the bowl of fruit and nuts.

'Here, take some,' she said, sitting down opposite Rosemary who, hands in lap and faintly smiling, let herself be lapped by Mother's scrutiny.

We scraped about for conversation but stuck to the ordinary, the inoffensive, the commonplace – Father's health, Rosemary's Fine Arts, my Master's thesis. Rosemary, to her credit, did not try to impress. In her own buoyant but unobtrusive way, she added her bit and let her quaint and vivid turns of phrase and her poise, more than any exaggeratd deference or misplaced brusqueness, reach across to Mother who, I saw, or sensed, in the nest of irrevocability, was not wholly displeased.

We stayed a mere forty minutes.

In the doorway, with Rosemary already outside waiting on the steps, Mother took my arm and riveted me with eyes that were grey and deep and probing.

'You've made your peace with me, Bernard,' she said. 'What else can a mother do, but your father, may his years be many, won't be so easy.'

Father came to me in many forms, though not in the form that mattered most. It was the memory he revisited time and

again, that store and labyrinth in which he remained perpetually preserved and most tenderly revered – as a younger, pulsating man exulting over Spinoza, as the eager scholar gathering notes, as the fluent speaker holding audiences in thrall, as the printer in his press, smelling of paper and must. But he, the man, my father, of the flesh and blood now kept apart, neither reaching out to me nor letting himself be reached.

I telephoned each week. Mother always answered.

'God protects,' she said whenever I asked after him. 'May his years be many, your father is keeping well.'

In May, Rosemary, bounding in, bag over shoulder, buoyantly announced she was pregnant.

'May it be in a good hour,' Mother said flatly when I broke the news, and added as though it were an afterthought, 'Your father's out.'

When I hung up the receiver, I felt suddenly, inexplicably, afraid. 'The greatest good' Father had once said quoting Spinoza, 'is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of nature.' – I had never felt myself so separate, so adrift. In silence I went in to Rosemary who was studying at the desk, pressed her shoulders, bent over her, kissed her and smelled the cherries in her hair.

And ever thinking of my father I continued to drift in the months that followed, berthing nowhere, in my reading flitting between Russell and Wiesel in a bid to reconcile the world of reason with the world of madness that both Wiesel and my father had known. Time and again I saw him roll up his sleeve before his audience, saw him expose that blue number engraved on his arm, and I realised, with a jolting abruptness, that if any man had the right to believe or the privilege to doubt, it was he, my father, who had suffered that madness, and not myself who, nurtured in the security of unbeleaguered theory, had learnt of life from mere dabbling in books. And I wanted to run to him often, and lay this new awareness before him, but each time I fell short of action enervated before the image of his wounded eyes, his distance, his silence . . .

The semesters passed. I resigned as Chairman of the Ration-

alist Society and left it altogether. Soon after I gave up the round of parties, meetings, lectures and debates, and near the end of the year submitted my thesis. Its subject, that of manners and morals in eighteenth-century French and English fiction, had become utterly banal, irrelevant and trivial. Rosemary, well into the last phase of her pregnancy, showed signs of swelling. She put on weight, her rings became tight on her finger and in the middle of December, Dr. Ritter admitted her into hospital for rest.

'Well, this is it, Bernie,' she said with a sparkle, sitting up in her bed. 'We can start thinking of names now, can't we?'

'What about Joshua for a boy and Rachel for a girl?'

'I'll sleep on it,' she said with a lively toss of her head. 'Now hold my hand and wish me luck.'

In the corridor, I met Dr. Ritter. Tall, broad-shouldered and greying, he stooped over me as he spoke. His voice was deep and gravelly.

'There is no real cause for alarm, my young man. Your lady's pelvis is a little small and she has a little too much fluid on board, but we shall manage . . . You look worried, my young man.'

It was less worry than destitution that he saw . . .

The academic year over and the campus closed for the summer break, I wandered aimlessly about the streets of Carlton, escaping from the premature heat in a succession of bookstores, record shops and coffee-bars, while back home, alone in my flat without Rosemary's ever-reassuring presence, I watched television indiscriminately, listened to music without enjoyment, and opened and shut a succession of books for which all patience had been drained. I often thought of Father, alone in the press, setting type.

Three days after entering hospital, a Friday, Rosemary went into labour. It was arduous and painful and continued through the night. I sat in the hospital foyer, drinking coffee from the cafe-bar. The subdued light, the dark brown carpets, the lack-lustre prints hanging on the bone-coloured walls depressed me. I felt encompassed by a brittle shell with only Rose-

mary remaining to fill the aching hollow within. Dr. Ritter's remarks about her pelvis and the fluid troubled me incessantly, and, in the silent solitude of waiting, grew into proportions that made me tremble as I sat thinking, remembering, reliving, and mulling over again and again how different things might have been. 'Wish me luck,' Rosemary had said. Luck alone was insufficient. In that night of waiting, aware of the imminence of the birth of my child, I sensed the burgeoning of something grander, something more fervid, more profound, that another might have recognised more certainly as prayer.

And when Dr. Ritter came at seven in the morning to deliver the child, and I saw Rosemary again soon after, weary but quietly content, the baby cradled in her arm, its black eyes blinking, its lips sucking, and its nose quaintly flattened, that unspoken fervid reverberation swelled still more grandly and more profoundly and burst into the flush of ecstasy and the exultation of thanksgiving.

'He's ours, Bernie,' Rosemary said.

'He's us,' I answered, barely able to answer.

'May you both have an easy upbringing,' Mother said when I telephoned her. 'Where is your Rosemary? I'd like to send her flowers.'

'And Father?'

'It's Saturday,' Mother reminded me. 'He's gone to the synagogue.'

It was half-past nine. I shaved, showered and dressed, put on a suit I seldom wore. I found a skull-cap in a drawer and put it in my pocket. Outside, the sun shone calmly, the air smelled of acorns, and a breeze ruffled my hair as I drove across the city to St. Kilda where my father had gone to pray. It was with a lightness of spirit born of resolve that I entered the synagogue.

Slightly stooped, and swaying to the cantor's musical chant, Father seemed at one with the serenity of the place. Above, the dome rose high and dust-laden beams of yellow light tumbled through the windows, converging on the rostrum where the cantor sang. Father, in an undertone, sang with him. Before the Ark covered in velvet, above which arched the legend

'Know Before Whom Thou Standest', the congregation prayed, bound in a solidarity from which I felt myself apart. But in my own way, in the way of inner ecstasy for which I lacked appropriate words, I reached out, whole-heartedly, to offer thanks to Whoever it was before Whom I stood. And I felt for Father then and understood his pain and, with my gaze, clung to him through the remainder of the service, awaiting that moment when I could approach him to deliver the news and be received in turn.

The service over, I watched him as, lovingly, he removed his prayer-shawl, folded it, and with his prayer book, which he kissed, placed it in the locker beneath his seat. His features – the brow, the cheeks, the chin, and more than these his hands – had acquired a certain heaviness, or solidity, that told, I thought, of inner certainty. I wanted to approach him and to greet him. But the congregation began to disperse and I moved with the murmuring current towards the outer steps where, full with the birth of my child and alive with the aura of worship, I stopped to wait for him

Coming out, he saw me, hesitated, looked me up and down, held his breath. There were deep creases beside his eyes. He wore his summer suit.

'Father,' I said, approaching, reaching with words across the physical space between us. 'I have a son . . . You are a grandfather . . . '

I reached out, but the fingers of my reaching met with steel. He brushed past me and descended the steps. There were people still about. I ran after him.

'I know it's been hard, but listen to me. For one moment.'

'What is there to say?', he asked, in that crusty unemotional tone that haunted.

'I came to tell you, as soon as I could. Rosemary . . . this morning . . . she gave birth to a son. That's what there is to say. I have a son . . . '

'Then you have more than I have.'

Nearing the gate, I tried to reach him once more.

'I can't believe it. That you can so totally give us up. *This*

is what you survived for.'

'For this I survived? Apikoros! *You* can talk about survival, when you haven't learnt yet to wipe your nose.'

'Father, don't turn away. Not now. I need you. If there is a God, don't be so hard. Father!'

Turning into Charnwood Crescent, he drew away, walking in the shadows of buildings thrown upon him by the sun; while, left alone and standing at the gate, poised between the synagogue and the street, my private universe tottered about me. Without foothold and without anchor, I floundered, and stood amidst the rubble in the aching emptiness of ruins which, I felt, I knew, not even Rosemary nor my newborn child could ever adequately restore.