
Secret Purposes

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PART ONE

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'The jewes are not the men who will be blamed for nothing.'

Jack the Ripper

It always pleased the Reverend Isidor Fabian that he had only to step out of his synagogue on the Lindenstrasse and there it was, the first of the seven bridges. In fact, he simply had to walk across the road, in a straight line from the synagogue's wood-panelled double doors, and already he was on the Honig Bridge, and into the first chapter of his regular Sunday journey. As he stepped through the doors on this particular morning, sun-bright and clear as February days often were in Königsberg, he felt the heaviness in his heart lift a little in anticipation of the reassuring pleasures of the walk: the smell of the sea-laced air, the sight of the beautiful medieval houses lining the waterfronts, the sound of the gulls crying as they swooped low over the fishing boats, and, most importantly, the feel of his soul cleansing, as underneath each bridge the River Pregel washed his sense of sin away.

Isidor based his weekly walk on Leonhard Euler's 1736 paper 'Solutio problematis ad geometriam situs pertinentis'. The great Swiss mathematician, while crossing the German states by post-wagon in the 1720s, had become interested in a puzzle long discussed by the good burghers of Königsberg – which was: could it be possible, on a single walk, to visit all of the four separate land-masses of the city, crossing each of the seven bridges only once? The burghers had for years tried to solve this puzzle in practice, by endless Sunday walks around the city, but Euler solved it by throwing away the scale map and replacing it with a topological version: in one stroke proving that it was indeed impossible to visit every part of the city crossing each bridge only once, and inventing modern Graph Theory. Isidor, when in conversation with other senior members of the Königsberg Jewish community, was wont to mention often his acquaintance with the 'Solutio problematis', partly because reading a mathematical paper published two centuries ago marked him out as an intellectual, but mainly because it carried the implication that he had read it in the original Latin – and

therefore that Isidor was not just an intellectual but, in Jewish terms, a radical: a rabbi prepared to learn the holy language of the Other.

Isidor had to wait for the no. 14 tram to pass before he could cross the street to the bridge. Its slow rumble past took the edge off his improved mood a little, reminding him that, although Jews were not yet banned from using public transport in Königsberg, he knew of no one in the community who would use the trams any more: you were stared at so violently now, especially by the young men, and there was a story going round that Reuben Fischer had got on the no. 37 outside his shop on Kaiser Wilhelm Platz – as he had done every day for sixteen years – and the driver had refused to take his money, indeed refused to drive on at all until Reuben had been forced to turn and walk back to the street. Isidor kept his head down until the tram had continued past some yards away, in case there should be boys at the back window making obscene gestures towards him.

The tram gone, the bridge beckoned, towards the Kneiphof, the densely populated island in the middle of the Pregel around which Königsberg had concentrically evolved, and from which five of the seven bridges shot out – two to the north, two to the south and one to the east, making the island look on a map like a huge scorpion dropped into the centre of the city. Isidor crossed the street, his eyes fixing on the rising Gothic towers of the cathedral, the most prominent building on the Kneiphof. He had always felt that it spoke of his city's tradition of tolerance – the Königsberger Verhältnisse, the Königsberg Way – that the synagogue and the cathedral were built so close to each other. Admittedly, the cathedral faced away from the synagogue, as if disavowing its spiritual forefather, but Isidor still remembered the speech made by the old Mayor in 1896, on the inauguration of the synagogue, the synagogue that Isidor, nineteen years old then, knew he would one day inherit:

It is a savage time we live in today. Long rotten but deeply rooted ideas dare to come to daylight again. Thus, this day appears to me like the morning sun announcing better times. Here, in Königsberg, adherents to all religions and persuasions live next to each other in peace and harmony. To this, the local Jewish population has contributed to no small extent. Stronger than anywhere else, among them the bonds of family and friendship do work; receptive to any progress of humankind, glowing for the arts and sciences, filled with true and genuine humanity, at the same time obedient to the laws of state and faithful to its king, this ...

And here Isidor recalled that the Mayor paused, looking up at the great dome, the reflections of one hundred and eighty menorah-mounted candles glistening like a constellation on its copper interior (Isidor knew it needed cleaning now, but did not know who would be prepared to take the job, Hartmann and Co. having not renewed their contract); he paused, long enough for it to seem as if his rheumy eyes must have caught sight of something there on the roof, before looking down again at the six hundred or so luminaries seated in front of him:

... this is how the same Jew who once was burnt now stands before my eyes, and not mine alone.

But that was nearly forty years ago, thought Isidor, stopping his walk for a second. And then, before the melancholy of time and age could settle on him: so much for progress. The internal shrug that came with the epithet punctured his reverie, reminding him that he was nearly halfway across the bridge, and had not even considered the present condition of his pride.

For this was Isidor's secret weekly project: each of the seven bridges of Königsberg represented, for him, one of the Seven Deadly Sins. As he walked across each bridge, he would force himself to contemplate his own participation in that particular sin; and then feel how that contemplation, allied to the consequent sense of repentance which sprung up inside him like a reflex, would somehow free himself of the taint of the sin as he walked. He imagined it falling off him like the discarded skin of a reptile, off him and over the sides of the bridge, to be swallowed up and carried away by the river, out into the freezing Baltic Sea. Sometimes, he would consider also the sins of his family, or even of members of his congregation, feeling that in some way it might help to lift evil from them, too; that it was part of his calling as their rabbi to use his cleansing process for their benefit, like a prayer on their behalf. His route each week did not necessarily follow the classical order of the sins – pride, covetousness, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, sloth – but instead was based on whichever sin was uppermost in his mind, which, as a matter of self-discipline, he would always leave until last.

Isidor tried to focus on his pride for the remaining twenty yards or so of the bridge, but it was difficult, as his mind, meditative, as religious men's are, was whirring at the moment, destabilising the rigour of his self-scrutiny. Pride, he thought, forcing himself to disregard the other voices in his head, when recently have I fallen victim to it? Concentrating hard, he remembered feeling a glow of self-satisfaction following his sermon last Shabbos, delivered on one of his favourite passages from Deuteronomy:

Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not make an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure – the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish, that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them ...

He had always liked this passage because, theologically, it was so modern: he always felt while reading it, or reciting it out loud in the synagogue, that in it one could hear religion as we understand it today being born, individuating itself from all the tribal fantasy-narratives that preceded it, with their multiple animal and planetary deities. The primitives were people who just looked around them, he had said, naming whatever frightened them as gods. But this imagination of God, as he remembered daringly putting it, as a formless thing, invisible but omnipresent, was a precise historical moment: the creation of the cornerstone of all modern religion, faith – religion as the worship of what you could not see.

The rabbi was over the bridge by the time he'd finished reciting the words in his mind, and then felt a little embarrassed and confused, knowing that what he had intended as a searing indictment of his pride had ended up simply as a – rather pleasant – contemplation of something he had been proud of, his sermon. The replaying of his words in his mind had left him feeling not abashed but rather pleased with himself – exactly the opposite of what his ascetic endeavour was supposed to achieve. He looked behind him, back towards the synagogue, and considered starting again; but he felt that to do so would be, as it were, breaking the rules. And, besides, time was getting on – the entire walk, which used to take him only an hour and a half, now took him nearly three, and he had promised Eleanor that he would be back by noon: she was making salt cod and latkes. Any lingering doubts were made up for him by the arrival of two uniformed men – SA, were they? Isidor wondered: he could never remember which paramilitary group was which in the new regime – who began erecting some sort of platform at the Kneiphof end of the bridge. He hurried on into the island.

Isidor was of course aware that in an Orthodox sense this whole undertaking was a sin: the Seven Deadly Sins were a Christian invention. Technically, sin itself was a Christian invention, a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *chait*, meaning an error, a mistake. In the original text of the Bible, Adam and Eve's eating the apple of knowledge was *chait*, which makes sense, as Isidor had once pointed out in another sermon, since how can you deliberately do anything without knowledge? Knowledge allows you to discern what is good and what is evil. Before knowledge, all sin can be only *chait*. Some Talmudic scholars whom Isidor had studied liked to believe that this demonstrated a greater generosity of spirit on the part of Judaism, allowing for the idea that human beings are often passive in their failings: the evil they do is not always their fault.

Well, Isidor thought, true though that might be, it seemed to make little difference to God, not at least when it came to punishment: I mean, what would He have done to Adam and Eve if they had eaten the apple deliberately? It was just semantics. The Old Testament was all about the dynamic of transgression and chastisement. As a liberal, Isidor was interested in how that dynamic could be made a bit more human, or rather, humane; and, for him, the key was the most Jewish value, atonement. What is the fate of the transgressor?, Leviticus asks. He shall bring a guilt-offering and it shall atone for him. His walk over the bridges was his guilt-offering. The sins were a way of packaging his transgressions. And because there were seven of them, they appealed to the Kabbalist in him, the numerologist: seven was the most significant number in Judaic lore, after three. God made the world in six days and

rested on the seventh, hallowing it. He was sure, historically, that the reason Pope Gregory had originally placed the Deadly Sins into a list of seven went back to this root.

He often chuckled to himself, wondering what Esra Munk, the leader of Adass Israel, the ultra-Orthodox section of the community, would do if he knew of his musings: try to have him excommunicated, no doubt. Adass had already insisted on separate prayer-meetings, following the decision – pushed through by Isidor soon after he took office in 1912 – to install an organ behind the synagogue altar. For a while, it looked as if they might come back, but then he had gone further – too far, even for some of his liberal colleagues, who had left to join Adass – with the introduction of women into the choir. Isidor won this battle, though: synagogue attendance was up nearly three hundred seats by the end of his first two years in the job. And this was why he was unashamed of his small heresy; he knew that the survival and augmentation of the community required modernisation, and any modernisation in religion inevitably involved borrowings – what were the organ and the gorgeous sound of the women’s voices floating above the chazan’s on Kol Nidre night if they were not, stylistically, Christian? Besides, Isidor felt that, by accepting into his spiritual core some small trappings of Christian ideology, he was only living up to the Königsberg Way, the way epitomised by the Mayor in his speech that day. As he continued his walk down Domstrasse to the Köttel Bridge, he remembered the words on the grave of Königsberg’s greatest son, just behind these cathedral walls, overlooked by the university beyond: *Der bestirnte Himmel über mir, das moralische Gesetz in mir.* ‘The starry Heavens above me, the Moral Law within me’: so Kant had said in the Critique of Pure Reason. Isidor felt proud – sinless pride, just as he should at this point in his journey, devoid of self-congratulation – to be part of the intellectual culture that clustered around these words.

Approaching the Köttel Bridge, he found his thoughts once again magnetically drawn back to the pressing issue in his life. Leave it, he thought, leave it until the last bridge; leave it until you want to feel anger. The Köttel Bridge, like the Grüne Bridge two hundred yards beyond it, overlooked the Börse, the enormous, palatial Königsberg stock-exchange. This had served Isidor rather well on previous walks, as it allowed for an easy contemplation of envy; he had only to imagine the greed-charged traders inside, making their sweatless wealth, their pockets – as he conceived of them – overflowing with notes conjured there by the strange magic of the market, and he would feel the sin immediately, as a physical sensation, a hot flush of envy. He had done that too often before, though, and his response had become Pavlovian. As he stepped onto the bridge today, not knowing exactly how to catalyse envy within him, the idea suddenly came to him that his interest in Christianity might be a form of envy. He was so shocked by this idea that he paused, holding on to the iron side-railings of the bridge. But perhaps it was true. He had to admit it – he envied Christianity. He envied its simplicity – a few proscriptions, rather than 613 fidgety laws to obey; no complicated dietary regulations; no inscrutable prayer-regulation – and he envied its iconography. A man on a cross. What could compete with that as a central image? Such power. What was Judaism’s central image? A star. And not a heavenly body, but a topological representation of a star, drawn as if by Euler himself, like the religion, abstract, mystical, disconnected from human experience. Isidor felt these ideas rush in on him, and a panic begin to

seize his inner self, but they would not stop. At heart, he knew, he was interested in religious success – those three hundred seats were still his proudest achievement – and it seemed to be coming to him, all at once, the reasons why Christianity was so successful. The cross-breeding of God and man – Jesus – was such a brilliant conceit, creating a worship that was a kind of empathy, a unique combination of adoration and identification.

Luckily for Isidor, his train of thought was broken by a hooting alarm sound, announcing the arrival of a tall fishing boat immediately to his left, and the consequent opening of the bridge. He moved back, off the lifting middle section. Marvelling at the way the concrete arched slowly up towards him, like a palm commanding stop, his mind calmed a little: perhaps it was just the times, he thought reassuringly, that had made his thoughts screech so against the grain of his own faith. He felt slightly awkward, though, standing among the small group of people gathered on the bridge waiting for the boat to pass. It made him realise how much his walk, in recent times, had unconsciously started to exclude rest; how preferable, out on the streets, now, it was to keep moving. Those around him all seemed like ordinary Königsbergers – a young couple, arm-in-arm, a stout older man carrying an umbrella, an upper-class lady in a fine fur coat, two children in school uniform, like small sailors in their suits – but Isidor, even with his head down, could feel their eyes on him, sizing up the length of his beard and the blackness of his Homburg. He could sense their discomfort, their inarticulate uncertainty about how to deal with this sudden enforced proximity to a Jew.

The ship passed through, and the two halves of the bridge came back together again. As they began to dock, Isidor wondered if this opening and shutting mechanism could be incorporated into his allegory, in terms of the bridge representing the sin: the opening and closing of the envious heart, perhaps? Although did that make sense ...? Before he had time to think it through, the bridge halves had closed, and the crowd around him had moved off. Watching their backs hurrying away, Isidor felt the intricacy of his thoughts slacken a little. I just envy them, he thought, restarting his walk: their normality, their complacent impunity. I just envy the fact that they can walk the bridges of Königsberg without fear. He held this thought as he moved behind those who had shared his space a moment before, and as others, similarly free, came towards him from the other side: for a moment, repentance was not forthcoming, until he remembered that therefore what he envied about his fellow citizens was that they were not Jews.

Off the Köttel Bridge, Isidor turned right into Börsenstrasse, which ran along the river the length of the Börse, and then right again into the Vorstädtische Langgasse, which led directly on to the Grüne Bridge: gluttony. It was his simplest sin. Isidor had always loved his food; like many Jews, it was his primary pleasure. When Tussel, the old Shidduch, had first presented Eleanor to him, her head shyly bowed, her hands clasped in front of her virgin's smock, his heart had fallen a little, he remembered – she was no beauty. Her eyes were a touch crossed, and she had clearly inherited her father's nose – the young Isidor could not help imagining, briefly, her nostrils overflowing, like his, with grey, spiky hair – but his spirits had picked up when Tussel, perhaps sensing Isidor's initial reaction, had said, a little pleadingly: 'She's a splendid cook.' It was true. At the first mouthful of her lokshen

pudding, Isidor's eyes had begun to moisten, and it was all he could do to stop himself turning to her to say: 'This more than makes up for the nose.' Nice noses, he knew, were ten a Deutschmark, but lokshen pudding like manna – where would he find that again?

Lokshen pudding, home-marinated schmaltz herring, gefilte fish, sweet, sweet red cabbage, still-warm-from-their-black-oven chulah, borscht the colour of blood, chopped liver as smooth as you like, boiled salt beef, kibbeh, kneidlach – she could make them all, and Isidor often found himself fantasising about her food, as other men might have done about their wife's – or mistress's – body. Still now her food remained luxuriously good, because Stein the grocer kept all the ingredients especially back for her, despite the shelves in his shop being half empty these days, what with most of his suppliers refusing to trade. As Isidor stepped onto the bridge, he was already, aided by the smell of fresh fish rising from the boats moored beneath, tasting in his mind the salt cod, soaked by Eleanor not in water but in lemon juice, making the cooked fish sharp and sweet at the same time; and the latkes – oh, her latkes! – nothing else he'd ever tasted did so literally melt in the mouth, like butter, like the softest, silkiest butter. He felt the saliva collect in his jaw, and his spirit settle easily into gluttony; and, lost so deeply in the daydream of Eleanor's cooking, was nearly over the bridge before he'd even considered repenting for the third time today. This was a common problem for Isidor on the Grüne Bridge, not just because he so quickly found himself spellbound by latkes, but because he was not entirely convinced that gluttony was a sin. Did not the Lord say to Adam: Everything that lives and moves will be food for you? This same Lord who rained bread from the heavens for our people in the wastes of Sinai? It was a big difference between the religions, between the cultures, Isidor thought. Jesus was a Jew, yes, but we should have known something was not quite straightforwardly Jewish about him when he decided to fast for forty days and forty nights.

None the less, more to fit in with his schemata than for any deeply felt spiritual reasons, he managed to cobble together some vague feelings of guilt about the over-indulgence of his taste-buds – feelings that were sharpened by remembering how many families in the community were unable now to get hold of kosher meat at all – and the last ten yards or so of the bridge were taken up in an attitude of demure atonement. Once over the bridge the Vorstädtische Langgasse became the Kneiphöfische Langgasse, a long road that ran the length of the central island; incorporating as it did the Grüne Bridge to the south and the Krämer Bridge to the north, it was the only road directly to connect the three main land-masses of Königsberg. Isidor passed the Catholic church, St Katherine's, and, only a little further on, the Lutheran church with its tall, thin steeple. The houses here, on the crammed space of the island, were packed high and narrow, most of them four or five storeys, hiding elegant courtyards through which Isidor would never walk. He imagined their central fountains, their high, overlooking galleries, their cloistered lawns. Further down the street, the ground floors of the houses had been converted to elegant shops: fashionable ladies' outfitters, expensive delicatessens, exquisite florists. Isidor did not need to look into their windows, knowing that he could not afford to buy any of their products, and preferring not to notice if they had *Wir bedienen keine Juden* signs up.

He was glad when he saw the first sight of the river and the Krämer Bridge; it was so much easier to focus the mind once on the bridge. Lust, however, was not really one of Isidor's priority sins. He and Eleanor had five children, four girls and a boy: not a huge family by rabbinical standards but enough to demonstrate that he had followed the Lord's most fundamental commandment fully enough. He had tried his best to be a good husband to her in this regard, knowing that intercourse was one of the three basic provisions a man must make for his wife, along with food and clothing. Latterly, though, she seemed little interested, tending to go to bed before him and be asleep – sometimes Isidor thought she might be pretending, but he wasn't sure – by the time he came up from his night reading. Spiritually, this did not cause him pain. Now that she was past child-bearing age, Isidor did not consider their abstinence an offence against the Law, as it would have been twenty, even ten, years ago. In fact, he sometimes wondered, in his more abstruse theological contortions, if abstinence was in fact the only path available for them under the Law considering that sh'chatat zerah – destruction of seed – was never permissible, and, frankly, spilling his seed into Eleanor these days was as good as destruction. He knew that sh'chatat zerah generally referred to certain other processes by which seed got destroyed, but still, technically, it meant any case where ejaculate could not physically end up in fertilisation. He wondered if God, a stickler at the best of times, would consider sex with Eleanor a version of the sin of Onan; whom God had killed for his act.

Physically, too, the withdrawal of sexual intimacy caused him little pain; long ago, he had sublimated all that desire into food and theology. Thus, the falling of the flesh on her face, and the rising of it on her body, had not, as with some men it does, caused him to turn away from her, towards younger women. Once, or twice, in the last few years, he had caught sight of women looking at him from the upper gallery of the synagogue – a young girl rapt, as it seemed, by his words; or a widow, gauging him through her veil – and the thought had crossed his mind: What if? He knew there were clergy of all denominations who abused their position for just such reward. But it seemed such an emotional shlep, for Isidor, to go to that place, for pleasures he had never really known and now was too old to begin learning about.

It was a quandary for Isidor, this bridge. He found himself in the invidious position of having to drum up sinful thoughts he didn't actually feel just so he could repent of them. He could, of course, have missed it out, but, like all religious Jews – it is an autistic creed – he needed order and regulation; walking six of the seven bridges just because he didn't particularly indulge in one of the sins would have felt incomplete. So he forced himself to imagine one of these synagogue women approaching him after a service, and inviting him back to her house, and plying him with wine, and food, and more food, and somewhere in the convergence of his excitement about food and the idea of it being served to him by a woman not his wife, he managed to create a feeling inside that served well enough as illicit lust. He imagined it, duly repented of it, and left the Krämer Bridge behind.

He continued up Kantstrasse, into the more heavily populated northern part of the city, and then turned right into Kaiser Wilhelm Platz, dominated in its centre by an imposing bronze statue of Bismarck, pointing skywards, ringed by fountains, the epaulettes on the Imperial Chancellor's uniform turning green. The square was busy with traffic, and, as Isidor paused, waiting to cross the road, he noticed he was

standing by the granite cube which marked the tomb of Hans Luther, the eldest son of Martin, the reformer. A phrase came into his head – *Bleibe im Lande und nähre dich redlich* – ‘Stay in the land and make an honest living’. He had heard it a lot lately from people in the community, particularly those who thought themselves most German and least Jewish; it had become almost a motto for them, a badge of honour, a manifesto, of their decision not to emigrate. It was funny, he felt, because they thought it was a typically German proverb, but Isidor knew that it was from Luther’s translation of the Hebrew Psalms, the deranged theologian’s typically puritanical mistranslation of the original, luxurious, ‘Dwell in the land and truly you shall be fed’. Last time Solly Weinstein, who was particularly fond of *Bleibe im Lande*, had quoted it at him, Isidor had replied with another of Luther’s sayings: ‘In Prussia, there is an infinite number of evil spirits.’ A clever reply, but pointless, Isidor knew, as Solly just looked confused, and besides, in principle, Isidor agreed with him anyway: he had no intention of leaving Germany.

The cars and carriages subsiding for a moment, Isidor crossed the square, towards the Schloss, the palace built by the Knights of the Teutonic Order when they made Königsberg their fortress in the thirteenth century. Isidor had visited the Schloss as a child, on a school day-trip; on entering the quadrangle, he thought he had never seen a space so vast, somehow all the more so for being enclosed. It was a good trip, he remembered, as he walked past the lofty Gothic tower that grew out of the Schlosskirche, built into the quadrangle’s southern corner. He remembered the Prussia Museum, with its towering portraits of Wilhelm II and Frederick the Great, in gilt frames which he had thought spun of real gold; he remembered the coats of arms emblazoned on every wall, a black eagle crucified by its wings on a yellow cross; and he remembered his mix of horror and fascination on being shown the Blutgericht, the old torture chamber, converted since into a wine-room but still exhibiting some utensils of pain: it reminded tiny Isidor of his uncle Joseph’s carpentry workshop, full of strange, unknowable wheels and levers. He passed a banner strung along the outer wall announcing the arrival of a new exhibition inside – *Health, Strength and Beauty: A Celebration of New German Art* – but paid it no attention: since the New Year, the Schloss had been closed to Jews.

At Schmiedestrasse, he turned right, back towards the Kneiphof, and the fifth bridge of his journey (in the old days, he used to extend his walk further north, up Königstrasse as far as the old city walls, but a combination of age and the sudden remembrance that the street was about to be renamed Hermann Goering Strasse drained him of the energy to do so now). Despite the bite in the air, it was bright enough for tables to be laid outdoors at some of the cafés, and Isidor caught the burnished smell of Viennese coffee and pastries as a waiter’s tray went past towards a group of seated young women, laughing, he hoped not at him. The Schmiede Bridge lay ahead, and he put the scene out of his mind, concentrating on his covetousness. He always used this last section of the Schmiedestrasse to try to separate clearly in his mind the difference between covetousness and envy. As far as he understood it, envy represented the more destructive urge: whereas covetousness meant the desire to possess the fruits of another’s success for oneself, to the point of wanting to steal them, envy was the active hatred of another’s success, to the point of wanting to destroy it. As he stepped onto the bridge today, however, this distinction, which had seemed entirely clear to him in the past – his theological mind loved

nothing better than such fine separations of meaning – appeared suddenly muddled: taking possession of someone else’s wealth, for example, would always involve the destruction of it for them, and so could be motivated by either envy or covetousness. Surely, in fact, there could be no envy without covetousness, and no covetousness without envy? In which case, was there any need for two sins? Was not the existence of the two sins just the product of the early Christian thinkers’ desire to overload sinners with the weight of their own wrongdoing? Or perhaps just to produce seven, because it was a holy number? These thoughts distressed him, ruinous as they were to the pattern of his walk, and, at heart, he knew they were themselves the products of anger, the sin he was putting off, because they were irritated thoughts, sparky and chafing. He was still smarting from what on the Köttel Bridge he’d realised in himself was a certain captivation with Christianity.

Standing at the entrance to the bridge, he took two or three deep breaths, drawing the salt wind down to his lungs. He needed to rein in his mind, he thought. Anger is propelling my thinking out of control. To calm himself, he said ‘Covetousness’ out loud, gravely, as if beginning a sermon: it drew a startled glance from a small urchin boy sitting on the bridge wall, who ran off scared. He walked onto the bridge. Going back to basics, with each step he rehearsed in his head the words of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s. He wondered if he did covet any of those things. At the moment, most of his neighbours’ possessions were being taken away from them, bit by bit. Soon there would be nothing left to covet anyway.

Then he remembered that Oshor Finkel, the lad whose family owned the old brick factory, had come to his office in the synagogue last Monday and told him that he had obtained a visa for America: visas for his wife and young child, too. It had cost him his stake in the factory in bribes, but he had them now. He fanned them out like playing cards on Isidor’s little oak desk. Oshor wanted to know if the rabbi could absolve him in some way, because they would have to travel on Shabbos, but Isidor was hardly listening – he was staring at the small squares of card on his desk. It was the first time one of the community had definitely decided to leave, and it made Isidor realise at once how serious the situation was, and how there was no possibility of such escape for him. Oshor was ... what? Thirty-five? Thirty-seven? Young enough to start afresh in the skyscrapers. All Isidor knew was Königsberg. All Eleanor knew was Königsberg. And besides, if – when – things got very bad, the people who stayed, who stayed in the land and tried to make an honest living, would need their rabbi.

But none the less, in that moment, staring at the visas on his desk, Isidor knew that he had felt the purest, most distilled covetousness. He coveted Oshor’s documents – his visas, his passport, his tickets. He coveted his new life in America, a land he had seen only in postcards, but knew to be a glimmering place, set on the sea, rising to the sun. He coveted Oshor’s journey into the future, into the modern age, leaving him behind here in a past crashing in on itself. He coveted Oshor’s possession, in these small squares of card, of something that, locked into his destiny, Isidor had never truly tasted, even well before the present regime curtailed it: freedom.

Walking along the Schmiede Bridge, Isidor felt the keen cut of this covetousness again, almost as he felt the east wind whipping off the Pregel towards the sea. A part of him was pleased: it had been a troublesome and difficult walk, with none of the clarity of thought that accompanied his normal Sunday routine, and now at last he felt he was getting into his stride. He had remembered a clear instance of sin, fresh, alive in his mind, for which he could precisely atone. A prayer came to his mind, from the Psalms, the one he always called up when reminded of his sin, but which he had so far held in reserve today: Be gracious unto me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the abundance of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I am sensible of my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. He murmured the words as he walked, in the quietest whisper, partly because prayer is private, and partly because he was frightened of being heard to speak Hebrew in public.

Over the Schmiede Bridge, he had to walk all the way back through the Kneiphof, back across the Köttel Bridge, and into the Vorstadt, the southern section of the city, to get to the Kaiser Bridge, which was set apart from the others by some two kilometres. It was always a trek, and therefore Isidor had marked it out to represent sloth. Today, as ever, he felt the pull of sloth well before the bridge was in sight, a voice inside telling him that his legs were tired and his feet were hurting, and that perhaps the best way to embody sloth was not to bother going to this bridge at all. He was always quite pleased to hear this voice, as it warmed him up well for the spiritual process of the bridge.

He went via the old synagogue. This took a little longer, but it was worth it to feel still that slight swell of pride – un sinful? Isidor wasn't sure – about the fact that a whole street in Königsberg was named after one of his community's places of worship. He knew there had been talk in the city council about renaming it – one of the ruling Nazis had said at an urban planning meeting that it brought shame on the entire Vorstadt – but at least for now it was still there, the street sign, not yet defaced: Synagogenstrasse. Passing the building itself, with its three rusty Russian domes, he noticed that a number of the stained-glass windows were broken, but it mattered little, as the community tended to pray as one now at Isidor's temple, the times not allowing them the luxury of splinter groups. Initially, this had of course swelled Isidor's congregation, and he remembered a Sunday walk about a year ago when he had had to use this Honig Bridge to atone for the pride automatically induced by the increase in numbers. He still felt ashamed about that now, even when the congregation had fallen back to below its previous size, with so many people too frightened to attend.

The sight of the old synagogue, fallen into disuse, propelled Isidor out of his momentary delight at the street sign. For a second, he felt his soul slip, and his body seize, as if a stone hand had been laid on his chest. As the Kaiser Bridge hove into view, he wondered if this feeling, which he'd felt increasingly in recent months, should change his understanding of sloth. It was normally quite a straightforward sin. He would think about some work he had put off, some minor mitzvah he had not performed, some domestic chore that Eleanor had had to nag him about to get him to do, and that was that: sloth, thought about, repented of, finished already. But latterly, he had found himself in the grip of a different kind of sloth, not laziness, or

indolence, but real sloth, as he knew Aquinas defined it, *acedia*, from the Greek *akedos*, careless, meaning that state where the ability to care about anything seeps from one. He had felt it, a form of torrential despair, and knew this was the place a man went when he was furthest from God. This sin caused him real fear: it would not wash off him on the bridges.

It was strange to relate this feeling to sloth, because of the fear. He had always thought of fear as a manic, electric thing, a thing that makes you jump. But this fear – it wasn't so staccato: it was like a blanket in which he didn't want to be wrapped, wet and heavy and never drying out, and rather than make him jump, it exhausted him. It was like a debilitating illness, like fear was in his blood and its symptom was *acedia*.

Touching his foot to the bridge, Isidor put these thoughts from his mind. His walk was a project of self-castigation, and required, at times, unblinking introspection, but this was something he could not face today, not with all he still had to think about at the next bridge. Instead, he went back to the earlier, easier idea of sloth. Waiting for dinner last week, he had asked Else's husband Chaim to help him carry the wood in for the fire, and then let him do it on his own, because the combination of the armchair in their tiny front room and a glass of red wine had rendered him too comfortable to move. Else hadn't minded anyway – she was such a good daughter, unlike some of his children – but when Eleanor had nudged him in the ribs he pretended to have fallen asleep. Isidor allowed himself a small smile at the memory, before settling into his vigil of self-reprimand and prayer.

Sloth slipped from him quickly as he turned left on Weidendamm, even as his body reacted against the thought of the long walk back to the northern half of the city. It was a wide, busy road that took him back along Lindenstrasse and some way east along the river-bank, through the fish market; as invisibly as he could, not wanting to be spat at, Isidor wove around the burly hordes of herring-heaving men stepping in and out of the fifty or so small boats clustered along the shore. The bustling noise and smells helped him keep his thoughts away from a premature immersion in anger. He was nearly there now; there was no point in letting it all out too soon.

With the Holz Bridge in sight, however, he hurried his pace still further, like a man carrying a full bladder might up the pathway to his house. He was bursting for the psychological relief of the bridge; and, with his first step above water, his thoughts scrambled out in an angry flurry, like the fists of a drunken man in a street brawl. Why did Isaac have to do this to him, now, with everything else bad that was happening? What kind of son would do that to his father? He would never speak to him again. He would cut him off without a pfennig. With each step, Isidor became angrier: he imagined, even though Isaac was now twenty-four, beating his son hard with the belt that his father, God rest his soul, used to beat him with, woven leather with a heavy metal buckle – something that Isidor had never done even when Isaac was younger, too present had been the searing pain in his mind to revisit it on his own children. He imagined slapping Isaac across the face, repeatedly, until the scale of his outrage registered in the redness of the marks on his face.

He stopped in the centre of the bridge and looked out to where the river curved away to its wider water, feeling its current rushing in tune with his fury. Isaac had married a shikshe. He said the phrase again in his mind, each word another turn on the ratchet of his rage. His eldest son had announced, at Friday night dinner no less, that not only had he been, for the last year, secretly courting this – he felt his mind spit – hussy, this schreiach, this Lulu – but that they had married, in secret, in a register office, last week. Isidor had nearly choked on his pickled cucumber. Through his coughing and spluttering he was aware of his youngest, Rosa – the other daughters were all married and at their own Shabbos tables, thank God – asking Isaac if he was pleased, now that he had killed his father. Isaac just grimaced and came over to slap Isidor repeatedly on the back, until eventually he cried out, ‘All right, stop hitting me now; I’m fine.’ In body, if not heart.

He had taken a sip from his silver cup of watered-down red wine; cleared his throat; assumed an air of grave dignity, falling back first on his knowledge of himself as a rabbi, rather than the more ticklish area of himself as a father.

‘The practice of not intermarrying,’ he had said, trying to keep calm, aware of Isaac still standing behind him, ‘is one of the oldest features of Judaism. It dates back to Abraham telling Eliezer his servant not to find a wife from the Canaanites. It continues with Isaac’s command to his son Jacob not to marry “the daughters of the land”. It is part of the covenant the Jews made when they rebuilt the temple after the Babylonian exile.’

‘So what?’ said Isaac.

‘Isaac,’ said Eleanor, looking up from her plate. ‘Don’t speak like that to your father. And at the Shabbos table, too.’

Isaac’s eyes, black at the iris, chocolate brown at the penumbra, lowered a little, whether in defiance or shame Isidor could not tell. A surge of hope rose in his chest on momentarily perceiving his son’s usual expression – open, engaged, a little sorrowful – behind the scowl of controlled bullishness he was presently wearing.

‘Well ...’ he said, less aggressively, coming round to face his father, ‘quoting the Bible at me is not going to make any difference. And anyway, I thought you were supposed to be a liberal rabbi.’

Isidor took a deep breath. ‘Yes, Isaac, a liberal rabbi. A liberal Jew. That means I have respect for other cultures and other religions. But I don’t want my grandchildren to belong to them.’ He searched for Isaac’s eyes in the light dancing around their cramped kitchen from the Friday night candles. ‘Otherwise they will not be my grandchildren.’

‘Izzy,’ said Eleanor, ‘must you do this now? It’s not a good time to do such a thing. I have heard that in some villages they have marched through the streets Jews who have’ – she struggled for the decorous word – ‘consorted with German girls.’

‘Is she a communist?’ said Isidor.

'Why do you ask that?' said Isaac.

'Because I assume that's where you met her. At one of your meetings.'

Isaac resumed his seat at the table. 'Does it matter? She's not a Jew. She's Catholic. That's what bothers you, not her politics. Would you prefer she was a Nazi?'

Isidor put down his knife and fork. 'Don't you speak to me with that tone, young man. Don't sit at my table—'

'Isidor,' interrupted Eleanor. He shot a glance at her. 'Rebbe ...' she continued, in a meeker voice, 'correct me if I am wrong, but it is a sin, is it not, to argue over the Shabbos candles?'

Isidor blinked, and swallowed. A half-hearted approximation of a smile flickered across his face. 'Yes, Eleanor. It is against the spirit of Shabbos, if not the letter.' His face went to his food; his attitude became, he hoped, benevolent. 'We will talk about it tomorrow.'

But they hadn't. Tomorrow had been Saturday, and Shabbos was not over until sunset, by which time Isaac had gone out; and this morning Isidor thought it best to go for his walk first, to allow him to mull over the issue. Truth be told, Isidor hated confrontation; it made his guts ache, the thought of an impending row. He had hoped the walk across the bridge would sluice him of his rage, but, rather, it had forced his anger to an apex, and stare as he might, he could not see beyond it. Knowing that he had the walk, and specifically this bridge, in reserve, he had bottled up his anger until this moment, but now all the bottles were broken and the well of it seemed infinite.

He stayed put in the centre of the bridge, in a state of some spiritual confusion. He did not want to cross another bridge without having achieved, at some level, catharsis; he wanted to reach the other side at least partly cleansed of anger. But it would not move. Below him, away to his right, the fish market had begun to close down for the day – trestle tables were being folded up and the fishermen were shouting out reduced prices for their herring. It reminded him of his impending lunch, and, through a supreme effort of will, Isidor forced down his anger, or at least changed the texture of it to something more like self-pity. What have I done to God, he thought, that my only son should treat me like this? My only son, Isaac, whom I held in my arms when the mohel's knife cut off his tiny foreskin, and held him still until he stopped crying, and although I knew it was right and good, the tears welled up in my eyes too for his pain. The tears came to him again, blown sideways across his face by the river wind. He felt the eyes of passers-by on him more than ever now, and saw himself as they must, an old Jew crying for his misfortune.

Spots of rain began to fall, ticking on the brim of his hat. He took out his pocket-watch, that was his father's and his father's father's: nearly half-eleven. With going back to the synagogue for a final blessing – he always did that, as a kind of spiritual coda – he was going to be late home. Self-pity wasn't exactly atonement, but it would have to do. He muttered a catch-all Hear O Israel, The Lord is God, The Lord is One,

and moved off, face down, along the remainder of the bridge, holding the rail for support. His mind was blank.

He decided to retrace his steps past the fish market, then into the Kneiphof, taking the Honig Bridge again back to the synagogue: the distance was about the same and it was a more pleasant walk. The rain was slight, the type of rain that falls when the sun is shining. Somewhere there will be a rainbow, Isidor thought: perhaps at the Schlossteich, the lake that cuts the northern half of the city in two. Couples walking in the surrounding pleasure gardens would look up and see it. Or maybe it would appear out towards the beaches at Samland, where once he had picked up a rust-red stone, glowing from the surf, and his mother had hidden it for him, because it was amber, and illegal for private visitors to collect. He remembered her soft hands wrapping the stone carefully in a napkin – taken from one of the beach cafés where they had had ice-cream and poppy-seed cakes – and placing it in her handbag. Isidor worried that it was still wet and would drip onto her important things. She had closed the clasp on her handbag, and put her finger to her smiling lips: Shush. We won't tell your father even.

Lost in reminiscence, as a man will when the present is comfortless, Isidor hardly noticed that he was already back at the Honig Bridge. He didn't notice at all until he heard the voice:

'Hey! Rabbi!'

Its tone was not good: sarcastic. Best to ignore it, Isidor thought, carrying on, but then his way was blocked by a brown-shirted arm. It pushed him roughly back off the bridge. Isidor wanted to continue looking down, but his face was pulled upwards by the beard. One of the SA men: not older than twenty. The left side of his face had shaving nicks below the ear.

'Can't you read?' he said. 'Or are all you Jews illiterates as well as thieves?'

'And he's supposed to be one of the learned ones!' This was the other: older, darker, with a heavier set to his face. He was leaning, with his arms crossed, against the sign that they had been putting up when Isidor had crossed the bridge earlier in the day. His remark made the younger man smirk, but it all felt somewhat forced to Isidor, the sneering, the bullying: like it wasn't quite natural to them yet; like they were still learning.

The darker SA man uncrossed his arms, revealing in his right hand a cosh. Isidor flinched, waiting for the blow. Instead, he pointed upwards to the sign.

'Read, Jew. I know you can.'

Isidor looked up. The words were written in Gothic script and followed by an exclamation mark. He read them out loud: 'Honig Bridge: Strictly Forbidden To Jews.'

'Sorry, Jew,' said the SA man, cupping his ear. 'I can't hear you.'

Isidor felt the humiliation, already a customary emotion. He raised his voice: 'Honig Bridge: Strictly Forbidden To Jews!'

'That's better.'

'Now you know,' said the blond one. 'So fuck off.'

Isidor paused. He could see the synagogue at the other end of the bridge, complacently beautiful, oblivious to this outrage. That was why they would have chosen this bridge, of course. Isidor turned away, and looked up to the sky, for guidance, for that rainbow, but saw only the Gothic towers of the cathedral, which this time brought to mind not the Mayor's speech opening the synagogue in 1896, but Hitler's, on 4 March two years ago, his final plea to the electorate, broadcast to the nation from Königsberg. As the speech ended, the cathedral's bells had rung out, blending with the sounds of the 'Niederländische Dankgebet', the 'chorale of Leuthen', associated with Frederick the Great's victory over the Austrians in 1757, which they had played at full volume on speakers placed all around Kaiser Wilhelm Platz. That, now, was the Königsberg Way.

'Didn't you hear me, Rabbi?' said the blond SA man, jabbing at Isidor's chest. 'I said, Fuck. Off. Or are you wondering how you're going to get to your disgusting synagogue now you can't cross the bridge?'

Isidor looked at the young man, his eyes as full of sadness as the other's were of hate. In part he was wondering that. He, and the rest of the community, would not now be able to get to the shul from the Kneiphof. They would have to take the longer, less scenic route via Lindenstrasse. His walk, which he had done every Sunday for fourteen years, was over. But in the main he was wondering what sin this was, and whether a bridge would ever be built wide enough and long enough for men to walk and repent of it.