

PASSE PARTOUT

by GEORGE LIEBERMANN, M.D.

My father fought at Dunquerque as a marine, in a critical moment at the beginning of the war. The boat capsized after it took a dozen of German machine gun bullets. He swam away from the sinking boat, an English marine saw him, and then helped him to get aboard the British vessel. This is how he ended up in England. He returned with the De Gaulle forces and landed in Normandie the fifth of June 1944, while I was still in Spain.

We had a three room villa in Bois des Vincennes. After the war broke out, men have been drafted; many mothers could not control their teenage children. I was no exception. We had a German Fraulein since I was a child, mother did not want to lay her off and employed her as a chamber maid. I hated her guts, talked back to her, and left to house for different pretexts while mother was at work, usually until late at night. At fourteen I turned into a vagabond; I skipped classes, and then ran away from home. My girlfriend was a pickpocket and prostitute two year my senior. I took her food from home and gave her my pocket money. We took the Metro to Champs Ellyseée, a rich crowd, easy prey for pocket thieves. I learned fast, but gave all the loot to Anne-Marie. She never even kissed me, with a prostitute girlfriend I remained a virgin. She was afraid that she could infect me with some venereal disease.

When the Bosh threatened Paris, my mother came all the way to Portes des Lilas to dig me up and take me home.

She said,

“I should have aborted you.”

And then she cried and said,

“Pierre, I am sorry, I love you more than anything in this world.”

I tried to reassure her that I also loved her, but I lost my faith in God, and then I turned mean.

Mitzi, the German Fräulein turned into chambermaid watched us pack, applauded and laughed.

She proudly said that she was German and claimed their villa for herself.

She drew a black swastika on her forehead. His mother was speechless.

Mitzi offered to help them pack.

My mother raised a hand to hit her, but changed her mind and then ignored her.

Mitzi said,

“Keep your French bitch! I get me a Dobermann! Frankreich kaput!”

Shoushou jumped on her pillow in the car.

I could not believe that this same woman raised him with such loving care, said that she hated the Nazis, just for the money. Fräulein will turn into a Frau and gets married to a Bosh.

. My mother smeared make-up on her face, rouged her lips, and we carried the pigskin suitcases to the car. She almost fainted. A man jumped to help her. I pushed him aside and helped her myself. She was a very pretty woman.

Although she was Jewish, she drove to Notre Dame. I sat in the car while she prayed.

We hardly talked. I loved her too much to be able to comfort her. She had a map of Spain and drew a red line to the Gibraltar.

“Maman, I must go, say good bye to Anne-Marie.”

She shook her head,

“If the Bosch will catch us here, it will be your fault.”

Pierre embraced Anne-Marie,

“Anne-Marie, this is our last chance, you never gave in to me.”

“Pierre I love you, but I would die before I passed a venereal disease onto you.”

She shook all over, while she allowed him to make love to her.

His mother waited in the car for him.

South of Paris we got stuck on the Autoroute.(highway) Refugees: women, old folks, children pushed their belongings on pushcarts, bicycles, carriages, or walked with a back pack or a bundle on their back. My mother never honked, she would have died if she had to honk for people to move aside, why I think that people gave her the right of way.

An awful noise broke open the clouds in the sky. German fighters swapped the highway with machine guns. His pulled over, jumped out of the car with her first aid kit and bandaged the wounded. I helped her, first with reluctance, then with enthusiasm. Most of them needed no bandage any more.

She cried and refused to go on,

“We couldn’t leave our people behind.”

She drove into a cornfield.

David said,

“What will the Germans do to my girlfriend?”

“You mean whores? They will always make it; only the currency changes. If she is smart, she turns into “Mother Courage.” (See novel by Bertold Brecht)

Another wave of German fighters flew low above the highway. I could see the face of a

pilot. They shot people close-up, as if they picked them, it looked like they spared children and young women.

Only screams and streams of blood cried at the murderers.

“We have no choice but go on,” my mother said.

We stopped in Lyon and bought the last baguettes and charcuteries in the store.

The Pyrenees tested the Peugeot to its limits. It got overheated and like a stubborn work horse, forced us to stop. We listened to its whistles and noises, stopped and cooled it with water, from an accidental creek.

My mother amazed me with her inexhaustible energy. She was still alert, drove with care, waited for others to drive or walk by.

The cars and trucks ahead of us must have taken off earlier. Pets sat next to their masters, grateful not to be left behind. A parrot slept peacefully on the shoulder of an old lady.

Everybody tried to be helpful. An older man that looked like a magistrate explained to mom that whenever she would use low gear, should stop often, to allow the engine to cool.

Canyons, boulders surrounded the road, only when they reached seven hundred meters height, did pines take over and the air turned cooled off.

The view was magnificent, but not for the French.

A sudden turnover took place, people shouted,

“The Spaniards, Franco’s carabinieri chased us back.”

Indeed, the highway looked like a disturbed anthill. People, vehicle made a U-turn, they headed back to France.

Mother said,

“We could not go back, must get to Gibraltar. Father is waiting on us in England.”

She pulled over. The engine coughed smoke and then stopped. It ran out of gas.

I said,

“I better go and find some gasoline, before it gets darker.”

“There are bandits everywhere; I could not take the chance of losing you Pierre.”

“We have no choice. Look to the right, it looks like a village of some sort. Where are houses, there must be a gas station. Give me some money. See you soon.”

Three hours later I returned to the spot where I left my mother in her car, next to a huge fallen Oak tree. The Peugeot was there, but my mother was nowhere to be found.

I kept walking up and down, towards France, towards Spain and looked for her gray costume and auburn hair, I kept shouting her name, and asked everybody, if they did not see a pretty woman with auburn hair, dressed in a gray costume; nobody did. No wonder, this was Spain.

I returned to the Oak tree and discovered a note from my mother, well hidden between dry leaves, next to the logo of our family drawn into the sand, a butterfly.

She wrote,

“Pierre, after I waited on you for three hours, I had an unexpected opportunity and had to make use of it. A Gentleman that knows your father takes me to Gibraltar, in his car, a black Citroen. We waited for another hour, before we took off. I left you money under the hood.. You will have enough to hire someone to take you to Gibraltar. Naturally we took Shou-Shou. Go to the Military Headquarters, they will make arrangements for you to get to England. Take care, stay away from girls, I love you,

Maman”

The money was in leather bag, five Napoleons, a fortune; he had to find someone to take him to Gibraltar for that much money.

In Spain there was hardly any circulation, the cars he tried to stop simply sped up, and left him behind. He was too young to call any attention. His outfit, brown corduroy slacks, muddy boots, long hair, a gray jacket, did not arouse any interest. He started to walk towards Gibraltar. He had a vague idea about where he was. It would have come helpful, if he studied some more geography of Spain in school. .

When he gave up hope he got a ride on an abused truck one Napoleon. After half, an hour the man let him off. I kept looking for a black Citroen, in vain, and walked another hour; until my legs gave up on me.

I moved off the road, found an old oak tree, folded up my jacket and pullover; set them next to the trunk of the tree, and tried to keep an eye on the road, but gave in to my sunken eye lids, I fell asleep.

My eyes opened to the gentle caress of a Gipsy girl.

“Who are you?” she said.

I said,

"Pierre."

Two more women showed up.

"Who is that white “joven”(youngster) Julia?" one of them asked.

"He fell out of the sky, found him right here, asleep like a bear. Look at his hair, brown and red. Did you ever see eyes like prunes? Purple. His skin is white like a sheep."

They looked at him, examined him and then unbuttoned his shirt to see more.

"Look at him" one said, "he has no hair on his chest. He is still a child. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

She caressed his head.

"Are you hungry?"

He nodded, but more women arrived. Julia made them sit in a circle.

"Here is our chance," she said. "As I told you before, unless we refresh our Gipsy blood, we perish. Remember what the doctor from Séville told us? Our babies die in our wombs, are retarded and deformed because, we are inbred. My husband is my first cousin. One of my babies died inside of me, another one before he could say mama."

"What is going on in your little mind, Julia? You don't mean that this punk could do the job?" one woman said.

"Let me try him out," Julia said.

"What about our men? They'll kill us."

Julia took me into a Gipsy cart. A dozen carts formed circles around us. She gave him to eat, whatever it was, tasted delicious and made him feel euphoric. Her long fingers caressed him and her fleshy lips made gradual discoveries of his body. When she reached, what she had been looking for, she exclaimed,

"Un toro!" (a bull)

Her body preformed a ritual dance as she stripped, and with every move, she touched

some of my sensitive body part; it was like a flash, it tickled and excited him. She wanted to prolong the play; when I reached out to stretch her long legs, she kept them tight together.

Women rattled castanets, danced and orchestrated our movements. Drums induced a sudden jolt, Julia threw me up; I landed in the position she wanted me

It was a Pagan ritual, only the jungle was missing. She backed up a little, raised herself up to get full length of their interface. I inhaled her inebriating scent, while we danced flamenco in horizontal, until we reached the clouds and the lightning of euphoria.

I could hardly wait for another night, and I felt cheated when Julia told me that every night, another woman will make love to me.

I said,

“Not in this world I”

Julia said,

“I made a list of all the young women apt to conceive, the date of their monthly period to give them maximum chance to get pregnant. The more you get pregnant, the better; you fulfill a sacred duty to the Gitano race.”

Pleasure turned into a mechanical act. I hardly saw what they looked like. It lasted for twenty nights.

When it was over, Julia said,

“I will introduce you to the men of our caravan. Never even blink at a woman, or you die.”

One of the women delivered a stillborn baby. Two babies developed copper red rash; blood and mucus oozed from their noses. Their legs were bent like oriental swords. Their lips

and anuses were cracked, they bled. Their finger and toe nails peeled off, they were bald, had no eyebrows. Their irises were red.

Julia fetched a doctor. After he examined the babies he said,

“They have congenital syphilis.”

Three weeks after I made love to Anne-Marie, a hard, red sore appeared on my penis; it did not hurt, went away; he did not worry about it. He contracted syphilis from Anne-Marie.

Julia screamed,

“Why did you not tell us?”

“I did not know.”

God punished him for the doing. Broken marriages, stillborn babies, babies with rashes, deformities; it was horrible to look at them.

He ran amok, away from carts, kept running like a crazy man.

Nothing ever went around my neck before but silk neckties, Pierre Cardin of course.

Vargas the Gipsy boss lassoed a rope around my neck.

It had been a year since Julia found me. We were in Italica, between the ruins of the Roman Amphitheater. Adjacent to the original gladiator arena, a campfire sparked mini stars into the Andalusian sky. Gitano men sat around in circles.

Candela performed the Ritual Fire Dance, composed by Manuel de Falla. My limbs were saddled to a burro. My head hung on a rope tied to the branch of a birch tree. A Gipsy midget rode the branch, and held the rope.

At midnight sharp, the fire dance ejaculated into a climax, the ghost of Candela’s husband burned in the fire, the burro got restless, raised dust clouds with her hoofs and then jumped onto her hind legs and threw me off.

While noisy women distracted the bully's attention, I stole the rope from the midget. Vargas searched my pants, but could not find the rope. He made me strip.

Gipsy women were hypnotized, by the look of the famous body that fathered twenty babies. I pulled back my leather trousers in a hurry, and placed back the rope onto my neck, to shut up the bully. I already stole Varga's gold pocket watch, and his gold necklace, with a locket, containing the picture of his wife, but he did not miss them yet.

They went through the hanging motions once more. The midget shouted to Vargas, "Holler when you kick him over!"

The midget whipped the burro and she kicked off. My tongue hung out of my mouth. I looked dead.

Vargas plaid a Sevilleta, and two girls danced flamenco. I applauded and threw him the stolen watch and necklace.

When Vargas saw me, and the jewels, he crossed his heart.

My only hope was my long pick pocket fingers. I was an escape artist, a snake man and a magician. My teacher was Anne-Marie, and her friends.

For a change, some Gipsy men danced flamenco, women rattled castanets, other men drummed their boots, while the circle around me became smaller and smaller, just like the loop of the rope around my neck.

It was a death-dance in the earnest and fit with the entourage. No "metteur" en scène could have chosen a more appropriate décor than the ruins of a Roman Amphitheater.

Julia's voice roused him.

"Hold it bandits! Cut him loose!" she shouted.

Men looked at her, as if they were seeing things. No Gipsy woman ever dared to talk

like that to Gipsy man. Taken by surprise, they backed up for the moment.

“How dare you talk to us like that, you unclean creature?” said Vargas.

But Julia kept on,

“All of you come from our unclean wombs! Tell me chicken thieves, what do you have against this child?”

“That child raped our women!”

“He could not rape a chicken.”

Gyula, a Hungarian Gipsy, man of bull size and looks, took off his hat, scratched his gray hair and said,

“Julia, we saw nothing, but look at this baby.”

He held a baby in his arms,

“Have you ever seen a Gipsy baby with a white skin like this? He speaks for himself.”

Julia jumped onto a barrel and said,

“Gitano men, listen to me good, because you might want to hang me tonight. I will tell you why and how. Many of our kids die in our wombs, are stillborn or deformed. The lucky ones grow up retarded. I took a baby to a doctor, he gave me the reason: we are inbred. My husband is my first cousin. We had one child. He never reached the age to say mama.”

“The doctor is not a Gipsy; all he said is shit of lies. We only believe in our traditions,” said Vargas.

This kind of talk, no woman would have dared to utter a few weeks back. Men ruled the Gipsy world. Women were looked at, as inferior. But by now, both men and women were regarded inferior species by the fascists of Franco.

Still, men refused to believe what Julia said.

Were they doing anything different from what their ancestors did? Refresh their blood? What for? Aren't they brave, tall and strong, most of them the way it is? Vargas could wrestle a bull to the ground in five minutes.

The women split. The ones impregnated by Pierre moved close to Julia. The rest closed ranks with their husbands.

Vargas took a haughty stance, with his legs apart, his hands on his waist, he played boomerang with a bowie knife, took off his hat and threw it on the ground. All men followed his example, short of Gyula.

Vargas spat in Julia's face,

"A few no good women chose the devil to refresh their blood. We want to keep our Gipsy blood the way it is, very old, as it survived through many generations. Our forefathers did not borrow semen from strangers. We reject all the babies not fathered by a Gipsy man"

Everybody shouted "we agree", with the exception of Gyula. They all knew that he was madly in love with Julia.

Vargas kept on,

"We get married for life. All unfaithful women will be returned to their parents and they must pay reparation money to the abandoned husbands."

Another hooray followed.

Julia cried,

"Vargas, you are our king. We cannot go back to our parents. The fascists chased them away, killed many of them, and took many to concentration camps. No matter how you feel, you would not throw us to Franco's carabineers, could you?."

"Not a bad idea. What do you say Gitano men? Don't they deserve to be thrown to the

pigs?”

But the men remained silent.

Julia fell on her knees,

“Make you choice Vargas, you want us to perish, or take us under the bridge of La Barqueta in Séville to hide.”

“Take them to Séville!”

Men and women, voted for Séville.

During the night three Gipsy carts took twenty women and David to Séville. Gyula tied fox fur onto the hoofs of the horses, and onto the wheels. He stopped at every cross road, hid the carts between bushes and trees and scouted for carabineers before they took off. At the outskirts of Séville, Gyula saw a patrol. They waited for two hours before they took off.

Once in Séville, they kept to the right bank of the river. Twenty tents have been sat up on under the La Barqueta bridge

They cut me loose.

I ran along the river, away from the tents with the babies, could not stop or go back, look into those tearful black eyes. It was midnight, my decision was firm. I go back to the Italica Roman Amphitheater. That birch tree had been destined to me. I hang myself to the same branch.

The cold wind goose-fleshed my skin; I sat on a rock and looked back towards the bridge. My sins demanded punishment. I walked through thorny bushes, ignored the blood that oozed from my wounds. First time in his life I thought of Jesus and I prayed.

After a long mind-breaking struggle my body lapsed between two rocks and I slipped into a half-conscious flash back, as Anne-Marry begged me not to make love to her. My only way out is to die.

Julia made me come to myself,

“What are you up to Pierre? The doctor said that you had no way of knowing, that you had it. Either way, I forced you to do it. It is my fault.”

Gyula and two other Gipsy men took the carts and horses back to Italica.

An envoy of my father took me to London.