**Woman Shot to Death**

*Only witness suffers a shock which affects his memory*

An event surrounded by strange circumstances, apparently caused by passion, occurred yesterday afternoon where Campana Street and General Mosconi Avenue meet, on the northeast sidewalk, in the Federal Capital. At approximately 5:30 p.m., the neighbors were surprised by some shouting—apparently the result of brief discussion—and the sharp sound of several shots. Near the corner, Sheilla Abud, Lebanese, 43, lay in an immense pool of blood. In spite of attempts of several passersby, Mrs. Abud died before reaching the hospital.

An examination revealed that there were four wounds, each made by a .38-caliber bullet, two in the chest, one in the face, and the other in the left forearm, with which, it appears, she tried to protect herself from the attack. In the purse that she was carrying were found her documents and a large sum of money, which makes robbery unlikely as the motive for the mysterious execution. Red spots are still visible on the wall and the sidewalk. Some circumstances, as yet unclear, make the killing more extraordinary. Near the dying woman, sitting on the sidewalk, was found a man, about 40, from whom personal information could not be obtained. Somewhat stunned, it seemed, the result of blows to the forehead—on which could be seen mud stains and an open wound—the only witness to or protagonist in the matter is under the effect of an emotional shock, that has provoked, according to several police sources, a partial amnesia, because of which he cannot remember anything, not even details about his own identity. In addition, several people who, by chance, were in the area, insist that they saw a young man, carrying a huge kitchen knife, run down Carlos A. López Street, some hundred meters from the place where the pernicious attack, which caused the death of Mrs. Abud, occurred.

The victim, who lived near there, was well thought of by her neighbors, who commented repeatedly on her singular beauty. Wife of a prosperous merchant in the district, she lived for more than twenty years in our country, all that time in the neighborhood where she died. The investigators trust that the unexpected emotional shock experienced by the man now in custody will be overcome, and, that with his testimony, they will be able to shed some light on this confusing episode. The case is being directed by Officer Santa Cruz, Precinct 47, the Villa Pueyrredón district.

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**PROVINCE OF BUENOS AIRES**

**JUDICIAL BRANCH**

**REPORT OF THE FORENSIC PHYSICIAN, DOCTOR SERGIO LEV. ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE WITNESS N. N. IN PROGRESS**

**Presentation:** He appears to be a person in a perplexed state, as if in a situation of being alienated from himself. His expression appears glassy. From time to time he enters a state of psychomotor excitation, acting in ways that lack precise definition. In response to questions about his identity, he smiles in an unmotivated and vacuous way, without being able to be precise about it and through an awkward sort of language.

**Antecedents:** From other people and witnesses who were on the scene, it is known that he was found in a state of self-absorption, immersed in his thoughts, during a rain and hail storm. That he struck the curb, after seeing an episode that caused a quick and unexpected impression on him, possibly the homicide in progress, and the posterior trauma provoked by the shock of his head against the pavement.


**Conclusion:** N. N. finds himself in a state of memory loss, without the ability to concentrate nor the consciousness to orient his actions and guide his thinking. His mental state is decompenesated owing to an earlier period of lowered defenses (anxiety, self-absorption, depression) prior to the traumatic situation. He could not tolerate the blow, and it translated into a loss of identity, disorientation, and confusion of his conscience and of himself.
clothing, their pupils filled with great amounts of life while we pass by, dancing, we turn somersaults once and again, holding arms, surrounded by accompanying refrains.

We swoop around the surroundings: one side and the other, fragments of a banner, a face with a white handkerchief, the hint of what will come. And we let ourselves slide through the multicolored human sinusoid, excitement that rises and falls.

The crowd continues its march, a strip that effervescently snakes between and statues of the plaza. We experience that ambivalent sensation of loss and gain, of blood vessels that press the outsides of ourselves, among faces in which we recognize ideologies, loves, experiences, gestures, common solidarities. And those others with which we reencounter the taste of the roots, the essence of nontransferable codes that define us as individuals, family and intimate histories, not shared, that precisely because they round off a rich and satisfied specificity, permit the integration of the group from which we are, were, and we make, not from an anonymous multitude. With past and trunk and branches that extend out to the newest fronds. The same and different. Like a game of billiards with two cushions, what we gain in Judaism, Hebrew language, Israel, fighting in your own trench, we are losing in Nicaragua, internationalism, relations with the good people of Mozambique and Holland, Italy, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Switzerland, Russians and Scandinavians, happy Paraguayans and Africans of copper-colored complexion. Perhaps gentle and poor little men, taken one by one in terms of life experience, insignificant particle compared to the magnitude of the Universe, with his limited life, the necessarily scarce experience of a possible incarnation. But we are large, enormous, when together, as now, we march holding arms, shared mystique, beautiful and wise multitude that occupies streets and sidewalks, insignia waving like birds that sing of the joy of being together. And together we will be able to turn our backs to look straight at the future, not to forget the past, but neither to stay there frozen, without return.

We don't lose anything, then: for once, our ways of communication coincide, the lack of global replies does not condemn us to a limiting am-biguity. The differences fade into a common carpet of humanity. While Ignacio loses himself in the mystery story of León in the solitary adventure, we find the rest in the "we," the voices heard by the fire, the mythical figure of Moishe Burech, father and mother and friends, brothers, comrades in struggle and loves, somewhat quarrelsome students, attitude of pride facing the anti-Semitic Cossacks and tailors' strike in Buenos Aires of the thirties, improvised oratory in front of a factory or in the assembly of the commune, the love that scars over the wounds and the illness of resentment that makes reconstruction possible, that understands the initial "big-bang" of the Universe as a cosmic orgasm.

The ill-considered (and brave) youthful fascination for the rapid and violent changes, the passion for life, the care of nature, and the pacifism necessary in a world that charges toward holocaust, all, all, and all of us are here, majorities and diverse minorities in this group of faces that are filled with hope and white handkerchiefs that, like a new and definitive hymn to joy, unites memories and portraits in the trees built by our heart. Because all History (construction of the tree) will only be a metaphor for the central meaning: mestizos and survivors. We start to advance down the wide avenue singing, singing, always singing, the rest of life ahead of us, and the memory of the identity (Jewish and Latin American blossom, plural and yearning) found in us, recovered for all times.
We circle around that expanding boundary, rings that encircle the center. Intoxicated, we clap hands. Small kiosks, placed at points which are tangential to contact with the undulating masses that are coming and going—taking the stage as center point—give out balloons, drinks, hot dogs, party flags. There are white overalls on the children and jackets of the same tone on the women, as if these chromatics indicated a way of purity. Children who cannot see the spectacle climb onto the backs of their fathers or play with the dogs that, with the line moving happily, circulate among the demonstrators.

They sing “Ode to Life” from the loudspeakers. A young man faints, perhaps overcome by emotion or the heat. Another adolescent holds his head downward and asks that others not worry. “It’s low blood pressure,” he says. A similar problem invades us: to shake off the generational tiredness that weighs on the shoulders, to give the baton to those who just recently begin. For them, everything is possible: change the world, modify life, to revolutionize the experience on Earth. The Universe continues spinning, we have yet to see thousands of dawns and everything is ahead of us.

We need unity, life and not death. We are many, and we want to be many more, because the “we” is not only a grammatical subject, the plural of “I,” but contains other added questions, conditions of intentionality, beyond the grammatical. It represents a determined configuration in the relation of speaker-group-listener-action, one among the possible. Tired of aggressions, we know how to behave. We, the people, all together, we defend ourselves from the tyrannies of urgency, the beam that crushes crumbs, the calls of the nonsensical. Because we want the best of everyone, the pluralism of the minorities is what we make flourish contagiously, sympathy, example. That portion of neighborhood tenderness and humor, of good porteno quickness, that makes up the common code.

The march begins. A group of young people moves among flags that have begun to wave in front of us, about fifteen meters away, unfurling the immense street banner that identifies them as members of the Engineering Student Center: concentrated faces, dark glasses. The poster, light blue with red letters, is lower than the rest—given that its bearers are located in a pendant, lower in the ravine of grass—and it obstructs the view of the scene for those of us who are behind. Nervous little councils, angry gestures, spindly protests are now heard. Until one, voice of the people, shouts with affection: Let’s see how the engineers run! The tension is lessened—adolescents who carry the flag laugh over the honorific mention of a far-off future—and the groups get settled again. The enemy is elsewhere, not among us. Let’s not lead aggression in the wrong direction. The same thing happens in politics as in art and in daily life: those who really change reality develop in a logical manner, the others with unplanned capricious, cheating routes. It’s difficult to differentiate: we end up assimilating originality to nonsense, if we only let ourselves be carried along by our impulses.

The plaza has gone on filling up. Open spaces between movements and posters are being closed. The pressure starts, light gas that envelops cisterns and pitchers, without forcing itself, but persistent. We go on squeezing together a little further, joining with the comrades, the passion of the multitude in the air, an essence that enters our throats. Thousands, tens of thousands, we already are hundreds of thousands. Forever the majority in favor of life, elbow to elbow, inspiring each other with pushers, hugs, and clapping that resounds, new, on the survivors’ backs and hearts. Gigantic popular assembly, fiesta of color and emotion, each with his own and all together. We are the multitude that frightens those who would make a coup, single and multiple identity simultaneously, upaz and ashes, violin and sweet flute, great orchestra that plays the polyphonic symphony without conductors. With this, “we” orders cannot be given, since the speaker himself is included in the work and characterizes it as “collective,” of all.

The different threads have wound around the plaza where we hear the last concert—not by chance, Schiller’s “Ode to Joy,” later utilized by Beethoven in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony, a moving song of love for the explosion of living nature—now we separate, in columns, toward the great demonstration. Many of us protect our militants, chains of grasped shoulders; others belong to more open and massive lines, or to small, isolated groups, like those of the National School of Dance and the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, figures with long red hair and informal
view your claim is just. But at times we forget that which brought us to live
in a commune: the idea of solidarity, to help the comrade, superior to the
compassion of mass society."

"Words!" Shaul shouts, a bald and thin old man. "These living quarters
belong to us. We wait, our turn arrives, and we ought to occupy them."

"None of this can be imposed," Abi insists, while he begins to raise his
voice. "But let's not get upset about a piece of bread, a television set, a new
house. We are men who don't want to feel ashamed of our youthful ideals,
full of illusion, but men, finally. Not accumulation machines nor inflicting
walls."

He pounds on the table. The murmuring ceases.

Why are we here? Do you remember? We wanted to be pioneers of a
new society, leaders of love and hope, villains who exposed our own
bodies to the risks and advantages of socialism. Let's rise for a moment
above the everyday! And those hope filled nights that we shared when we
founded this kibbutz! What happened to the generous qualities that helped
us overcome cold, hunger, war, hostile neighbors? What happened to the
disposition toward the common good that justified our adolescence, filled
the dreams of our youth, gave meaning to life?

Let's try to look at ourselves as we were twenty years ago. And let's not
betray that image, very new comrades! For that they call us pioneers: for
everyday heroism. We have always been a minority.

"San Lorenzo fans, we're the most, and we're the best," David says
proudly, while they walk triumphantly through the streets. He relives after-
noons of joy and fervor, the goals by the black Picot or the proud free
kicks of Facundo and Sanfilippo, stuck to the old, worn radio on the din-
ing room table, before the first television set arrived in the neighborhood.

"Dad," Eduardo reflects. "It's something very strange."

"What do you find strange?"

"To be part of San Lorenzo, here and now. To have won."

"And what's strange about that?"

"To be in the majority, Dad. It's the first time that's happened to me.
We could have done anything we wanted with the Tigre fans. Did you re-
alyze that? Take away their flags, hit them, allow them to live, kill them,
quiet their songs with our shouting, crush them. . . . Didn't you feel
good?"

Images overcome David: Jew, intellectual, sociologist, immigrant in Is-
rael, unemployed, social bastard wherever he might remember, always
condemned to be a minority. Now, for once—and his son was right—it
was like a bit of heat in winter, when a liquor circulates inside and warms
the innards. To be one of those who win, of the majority, of those who de-
cide. For the first time.

"It's true," he says. "I didn't think of it before, but it's true: I felt part
of the majority."

"How strange, huh?" the young man insists. "The 'others' must always
feel that way, members of the majority. Letting us live and all that. Choos-
ing to be a minority—for example, when we play against the River team—
and not ending up members of a minority by fate, like us."

And now we are all here, we are the enormous majority, that applauds
together for a stranger, intones anthems to life, against the flag-bearers of
death. We look at each other's eyes, while our mouths sing the recently
learned phrasing. The insistence on a long syllable, the intended tone for
the final repetition. For an instant, and possibly for all times, we are bro-
ers, although we may never see each other again. We recognize ourselves
in the others, exposed philatelists, militants of hope.

We have with us, seated on wooden benches or beach chairs, elderly
people and women with buns on their heads, scarves tied over their shoul-
ders, a thermos under the arm, the always present mate cradled with a
warm hand. Adolescents with nervous gestures and acne on their faces cir-
culate among the rows offering partisan periodicals, human rights publica-
tions, petitions to sign. We are different, with tastes and wardrobes, ages
and gestures, curious or concentrated expression, but what does that mat-
ter? We are in the plaza like the vessel that quenches the thirst. A boy in
old jeans, long hair in a pony tail has climbed the statue of the woman with
the large jar under her arm, white and opulent like a perfume bottle, and
he embraces her like a desperate lover so as not to fall.
He: And now the starry night, filled with light, summer again. Your father, Russian from Odessa, seated on the patio, sips maté, his gaze fixed behind his glasses. Your mother goes in and out of the kitchen, she wants to listen and, at the same time, she fears what is going to happen. You gesture, your face washed and without makeup, lips pursed, adolescent anger held back. Berna is the one who speaks, shielded by a fatherly and heated voice, while León sits at his side.

We’re only talking about a campout, sir. We are Jews and Zionists, that’s all. We are organizing a study week in Córdoba. An experience of joyful communal life. So that the young people can learn about the emotion of sharing, Jewish living around the campfire, songs and scouting games. The language of the heart. A new life for a better human being, healthier, less egotistical.

My daughter will not go. She is a minor, and, in this house, I still rule. We don’t mean to show a lack of respect. You decide. But she too should give her opinion. She has the opportunity to have an extraordinary experience, in a framework of Jewish education. I myself am a member of a kibbutz. I am here in Argentina, sent by the movement. We don’t harm anyone, wishing only to better the world and every human being, speaking about Israel and the future.

Your father, inflexible, sips maté. The man with thinning hair, patient, unfolds with smooth gestures, the purity of a youthful utopia. You walk around, nervous: you don’t know whether to intervene or keep quiet, you listen from off to the side, and you walk back and forth, a mix of nervousness and hope showing slightly through your middle teeth, so easily managed with the nacre smile.

The children arrive like first fruits. There you are, lying on the bed, face up, the pregnancy is far advanced, a flickering light (from the street) crosses the darkness of the bedroom and disperses over a blanket. The blue bed jacket, hands crossed over that belly that kicks and moves, the overnight bag at the end of the bed—put together months ago—with booties and little outfits and towels and all that. There were many nights with the rivers running side by side, exploding at the same time while your hand would squeeze the other loving hand (almost lost in the hollow, small and with a curled ring finger), the skin covered with kisses, the fingers that softly tingle the sensitive places, your head at times resting on your husband’s chest as when you were little—you would say—the grownups protected you during the stormy nights of thunder outside. And now, the curled profile and the mischievous expression: you gather your legs, you raise them, repeat the straining exercise that they taught you in the “Childbirth without Pain” course, smile broadly, and turn your head to say, “Do you see? So easy. Tomorrow or the day after I do a “Come on, baby” and the kid pops out.

She: This beautiful mixture of that which is born and that which dies, the brand new and that which leaves, the three generations—that are, have been, and will be—constitute the tree’s moment of splendor. Moved lightly by the twilight breeze, this multicolor plot that continually changes (the edge of tall naked poplars, standing close together), discovers easily its shape and size between the roots and the sky, the secret of the ancestors and the projection toward the heights, the speckless sky that divides the cosmos and its planetary dimension. You are like the poplar in autumn, David: green, ochre, and silvered. And only in that beautiful time—the first autumn days—those who understand can join in the secret which is bashfully undressed.

Abi, the kibbutz secretary, introduces the theme directly. Israeli style.

We need volunteers who would be willing to put off for two years their move to the new housing, so that we can receive immigrants here who arrive with their children, lack of stability, unresolved situations. We all know, comrades, that we’re not dealing with something simple. We have worked very hard, since we drained the swamps of this valley forty years ago, to achieve the material equilibrium that we possess. And it would mean almost beginning from zero, from the start.

“We’ve already done our part,” replies a man of undefined age and thin eyes. “We deserve to begin enjoying something of the terrestrial paradise, after a generation of sacrifices.”

“It’s true,” Abi answers. “It’s true, Amnon: from a personal point of
couldn't betray the others, nor let myself be seen working. A strike is a strike, isn't it? That caused me a problem with my brothers.

We went on strike and in order that the "big shots" couldn't enter, we set up a picket line. I was one of those who made sure they don't go through. But the bosses called the cops. As soon as I step forward to stop a strikebreaker, and barely grab his lapel, three or four policemen jump me, grab my arms, and put me in the paddy wagon. The "big shots" didn't understand that, if they didn't break the strike, they would have to raise our commission.

They took all of us from the union leadership to what was called the Special Section. I believe it was on Urquiza Street at the 600 block. I was held for six days and from there they sent me to the Police Department. On Moreno Street. As we were incomunicado, they separated us into halls, those bunk beds hanging on the walls, one on top of the other, mixed in with common criminals. Like it was in the ships, that's the way it was. Bunk beds, a dirty blanket, rats. As I was a foreigner, they threatened to send me back to Poland. I answered with gestures, I didn't even know the language well. There I met "the Russian Sow," Jacobito who worked for them and took the statement in Yiddish.

The "Russian Sow," a fat guy, a Jew who had sold out. He came and began to speak Yiddish, getting friendly, so he could find the truth in the lies, but we already knew, we were warned that you didn't have to say a word to him, because the guy was a sellout. He belonged to the police, they paid his salary. He gave me "advice." He told me that not even those "things" that were going to sell "for me," that was for my own good. And, years later, they came to me from the same Special Section, because of another ad in the Party daily. They said to me, "So you're still fucking around, communist?"

He stops in front of you. He's less than half a head taller than you, he is pretty thin, but the evil that causes your terror is in his drunk's eyes, surrounded by little red veins and lacking in compassion. He watches you. You can't go forward or move sideways.

"How ugly you are, little Yid," he says, without raising his voice very much.

León looks at you and then at him. Nario also comes closer, murmuring, "What's going on, che? Is there a problem?"

One of your legs begins to tremble, and you can't control it. Your eyes move from Paco to León, then you lower your gaze. Now it's Nario who insists, "What's happening with those stinking Kikes? Did the Kikes shit in their pants?"

Force is the right of beasts and all that. You know it. But, how many times can you continue crossing sidewalks every time you see them coming, feeling that terrifying humiliation—held like a disgusting cadaver that invades your nightmares—that hurt you as much as the imagined blow? You advance a few steps, and you call, "Eh, che, come here. You! Motherfuckers!"

Your voice cuts off. Your shaking stops the last words in a "stutter" that holds them in your throat. Nario and Paco figure out that you are referring to them.

"What's your story, asshole?"

It's León who is yelling, "Go fuck your mother the whore, stinking Nazi!"

There is a long, interminable moment of stupor. You think about your father, of your grandfather Moishe Burech, of all those who can give you courage in that instant. Paco is the first to react: he looks at León as if he had not understood and, suddenly, punches him fiercely on the face. You see the blood on your friend's nose and you want to respond, but Nario is coming toward you. Your legs are still trembling. You hit each other with hands and feet, bodies, heads, tangled up. The blows shake you, and, at the same time, increase your fury: you scratch, bite, begin to cry while you roll around embraced on the sidewalk, and you fall into the gutter filled with dirty water. León, you see at that moment, has gotten up and withstands, as well as he can, the blows from his opponent.
stand anything, so he bought a pair of dictionaries, and he began learning two languages, so he could speak to the other soldiers. They kept him until 1916. At first, he dug trenches, and that caused an illness in his legs, rheumatism or something like that. When he returned from the front, he was still sick—and then he went to work in a tailor shop and made the uniforms for the officers and for the army in general.

He began and ended as a private. He never liked stripes, military salutes, parades, and all that. He couldn’t put up with any fanatic.

It was near the end of the war, in the central plaza of Yarceh, when they killed this Bolshevik boy. I saw him. And everyone was talking about him in the village and in my family, many years later, in 1918 immediately after the October revolution. He was hardly more than an adolescent, he would have been about seventeen; he lay hurt on the ground, dirty and bloody with feverish eyes. A boy. A Polish officer approached him, with a revolver in his hand, and pointing at him, he said, “What are you doing far from your country? did you come to fight here?” And the boy answered him, “Svobodoi.” It meant “For Liberty” in Russian. The Polish officer got angry, many people in the village were watching him. He hit the Bolshevik in the head with his revolver and threatened him, “If you say that again, I’ll kill you. Why are you fighting, you Russian dog?” The fellow looked around and shouted, “Svobodoi.”

And the officer squeezed the trigger and blew his brains out. The story was long told in the village. We were very impressed by it—and especially in Yarceh, there were not many communists, I think the only one was the wigmaker, perhaps two or three more. There were more Zionists.

We were always in the middle. When the Russians came through, they burned everything, then the counterattack came from the others, and they burned the village again. A no-man’s-land.

The day of the pogrom, many hooligans met outside. We had a large iron door in front that wasn’t at all easy to open. All the men met in the first-floor apartment with hatchets, knives, sticks, whatever there was for self-defense. We women and children stayed upstairs on the second floor.

Just then, he came, the owner, who was at a son’s house, at about that time. The Poles wanted to get inside. They threw a grenade against the door, and they blew a hole through the metal, but they weren’t able to open it. Next door there was a store that had an open area. I remember that it sold kerosene, candles, soap, it was a general store, it was part of the house, and it had a door that opened to the premises. Do you remember? Eleven o’clock at night. He was a Yid too. It was nighttime. He didn’t realize what was happening, and he wanted to go inside. They said to him, “Ah, you have the key.” Then they opened the divider, and they stole_or broke everything in the store. And they got into the house through the back room.

We were horribly frightened. When they got in, they went directly to the first-floor apartment and the fight began. Everyone was shouting, and we were crouching on the floor upstairs, trembling. The arm of one of our men was slashed with a saber, but our guys killed a soldier, a Polish officer, they were all Polish volunteers who did the pogrom, they were brutal.

I was a five-year-old boy, but I still remember the fear we felt, the butcher’s blood-covered cleavers and knives, the alarms, the sweat and the noise, the blows, insults, someone who cried for God.

After all, they weren’t able to get upstairs. We defended ourselves well, and the others left. Then the Jews themselves formed a militia to protect the building.

I remembered that when, soon thereafter, a tailors’ strike began. I am in among the leaders… I don’t know the language well yet, but there is a great deal of suffering, a man can’t see that without reacting. In that period, I wasn’t really communist, but socialist, I read Di Presse. The others weren’t the same, the cuentenistas and other businessmen read the Idische Zeitung, were more to the right. But I am a worker, my place was there.

It wasn’t a partisan thing, everything was mixed together, from several parties. Spaniards and Argentines and Jews and even Italians. We were all tailors, that united us. We called the strike, but there were “big shots.” It was for an indeterminate period of time, until they raised the price, seven pesos for a jacket was too little. A pittance. When the strike began, I boycotted my older brothers too, since they gave me part of the work, but I
Moishe Barech lived with those nerves, always, he spent all day at the sewing machine, sewing and cutting, you have to imagine such a large man with so much energy, keeping it all inside, every so often he would explode. One time two large fellows, Polish grenadiers, came to pick up a suit. I remember that it was a Sunday morning, and the work wasn’t ready. So one of them pounded on the table and shouted, “What do you mean that it isn’t ready yet,” and he cursed my father.

My papa, without showing any emotion, said to my mama, “Hettie, efnummer of detir.”

She opened the door—the others hadn’t understood, of course, because Moishe Barech spoke in Yiddish—and my papa grabbed the first one by the lapels, raising him into the air, then with one punch he knocked him out of the house. He gave the second fellow a terrible beating. The two of them had to escape through the rear of the house, because people were returning from church, they’d been to Mass, and those fellows were embarrassed—they were just teenagers—that people see that they had taken such a beating, their faces, their noses covered with blood.

The story stayed with us. We would say, “Hettie, efnummer of detir.” And everyone knew the rest. But he wouldn’t pick a fight, never. He only defended himself and didn’t let anyone put him down. He had his pride, that was it. He didn’t like to fight.

When the army began to recruit men for the war, they made them show their ability with a rifle. They told my father to shoot in any direction or pretend to be near-sighted, he was just at the age limit—forty-five years—and with a pile of kids to support. But he was very proud, everyone knew that Moishe Barech wouldn’t be a coward in any way; then he hit six bulls eyes with the rifle, and they took him immediately. He had never carried a gun before. He left his wife and kids, and they sent him to the Russian front, in a company that had Hungarians and Czechs. He didn’t under-
I could never have predicted that it would be Fall, that it would be raining hard, that I would run as I got off the city bus, trying to make the green light, that crossing the street, a gust of wind and haze would scatter the folder of records that slipped from my arm; that diplomas and identity books and evidence of my life history would take flight at the precise instant that the traffic light turned red. That I was able to get my footing, to stagger across to the sidewalk, filthy, battered and bruised, sloshing around in the muddy and foul-smelling water of the gutter, soaked by that passing dark truck while dozens of vehicles surged ahead, wailing down Mosconi Avenue, some zigzagging, with their lights on. I remember that cloudy and gray afternoon, gusts of wind, my trying to get up with the help of the boy from the newspaper kiosk on the corner, while papers swirled in the pavement cracks, a light blue and white city bus, obstructing my vision for a moment, tree leaves scattered on the ground, my sense of desperation at being airborne, without a place to get my balance nor a solid support to hold on to, my past and my history and my surname spread over the sidewalk, stuck to the tires of some car, flattened in an unseen corner.

Do you understand me? I am still nobody. When another person looks at me, on a police summons, in line with those looking for work, I am nobody. In Buenos Aires, words and smiles don't count; only the facts. I can't verify my name, what I have done in my life, what stitches of guilt and innocence embroider the story of my life. I don't have a history. I don't remember anything. I'm tied to reality by this one old family photo that seems to be close and disturbing. But I can't reconstruct an identity from something of which I, more than anyone, am doubtful. Without familiar pictures, papers stamped with India ink and worn by my fingers, bits of parchment that show years of work and study, I myself don't know who I am.

And I need to know who I am. Overcome the resistance of memory. You can find me again. I am lost.

The rest is anecdotal. There is a story, possibly scribbled, of adultery. There is a woman in that store on the corner across from where I'm lying after my fall. My head hurts, I can't see well. There is a man, shouts, loud discussion. Everything happens in an instant. There is a revolver, several shots. Blood that splatters the yellow wall of the building, the sidewalk, my hands, my face. There is also, it seems to me, a knife, the adolescent who leaves running from the same house and rushes at the man with the revolver. There is a slippery spot, and I fall again, a blow to my forehead, confusion.

And now, a judge who gives me provisional liberty and a deadline to discover my identity, to reconstruct with your help, the cardboard bearing photos, the lost diplomas, that evidence that I am, in fact, a person of flesh and blood, a solid being and not a phantom separated from himself, the only witness of a crime—who can't remember the face of the murderer.

You don't believe me. Are you already convinced that I'm making this up? Okay, think that. Your opinion is not important. I need your services, not your compassion. Make me speak once and for all.

rejects identification as basis for identity aid.
family tree

An incident, a memory, a photo. That’s all I know. That’s why I’ve come to see you. You’re a doctor, right? Your job is to penetrate the mystery, clear the fog, pull aside the shades. Get to work, then.

Who was Moshe Burech really? Why is his grandfatherly figure, fascinating, yet unknown, the heart of the enigma? What use is a family photograph, forgotten for generations and found by chance in a large chest filled with yellowed papers—if chance exists in circumstances such as these—during a search for which I had barely two weeks, given the deadline set by the judge.

Why this need by the police to know my identity so quickly? Who other than myself is troubled by my lack of an identity?

Yeh, yeh, I understand your impatience. You want facts, not talk. It’s your job. Okay, here we go.

The incident.

To tell it straight out seems nonsensical. I went to apply for a job. The ad said that a resume was needed. I had been out of work for three months, and my situation was . . . almost desperate. Since we returned from Israel, several years ago, things have gone from bad to worse. I haven’t been able to fully readjust, to know who I truly am. No, don’t get me wrong. I’ve already figured out my name, that kind of thing. I’m referring to that . . . look, I have a degree in sociology, that got a decade ago, and I was going to apply for a job as a clerk, a pitiful clerk. As if I were handicapped. But what could I do? There were discussions at home with my wife and the kids, confusion. . . . So I put together an enormous portfolio, my identity cord, my transcript, diplomas from high school and the university, papers from the Registry, my kids’ birth certificates, papers from my former employers, recommendations, bits and pieces, CURRICULUM VITAE—bah! It was my whole life.
Moishe Burech lived with those nerves, always, he spent all day at the sewing machine, sewing and cutting, you have to imagine such a large man with so much energy, keeping it all inside, every so often he would explode. One time two large fellows, Polish grenadiers, came to pick up a suit. I remember that it was a Sunday morning, and the work wasn't ready. So one of them pounded on the table and shouted, "What do you mean that it isn't ready yet," and he crossed my father.

My papa, without showing any emotion, said to my mama, "Hettie, effemer of dextir."

She opened the door—the others hadn't understood, of course, because Moishe Burech spoke in Yiddish—and my papa grabbed the first one by the lapels, raising him into the air, then with one punch he knocked him out of the house. He gave the second fellow a terrible beating. The two of them had to escape through the rear of the house, because people were returning from church, they'd been to Mass, and those fellows were embarrassed—they were just teenagers—that people see that they had taken such a beating, their faces, their noses covered with blood.

The story stayed with us. We would say, "Hettie, effemer of dextir." And everyone knew the rest. But he wouldn't pick a fight, never. He only defended himself and didn't let anyone put him down. He had his pride, that was it. He didn't like to fight.

When the army began to recruit men for the war, they made them show their ability with a rifle. They told my father to shoot in any direction or pretend to be near-sighted, he was just at the age limit—forty-five years—and with a pile of kids to support. But he was very proud, everyone knew that Moishe Burech wouldn't be a coward in any way; then he hit six bulls-eyes with the rifle, and they took him immediately. He had never carried a gun before. He left his wife and kids and they sent him to the Russian front, in a company that had Hungarians and Czechs. He didn't under-