INTRODUCTION

When I think of writing about my life, it has to do with ordering, finding a form, even though one knows precisely the pretense of such an effort, its artifice. As a historian working on the lives of others one begins with the search for documents, the ordered remnants of personal life . Documents exist; they certify their own existence. But the rest is selected, the quilt a person has left of her life, something randomly or purposefully salvaged from the daily destruction. Those letters not consigned to fire; those ideas rescued from trash; those photos not given away or finally left to rot in some moldy basement. The historian starts with these, and the temptation is great to regard them as life itself; vested with significance simply because of their survival.

To write one's life, simply to sort out the clutter, to discern enough design to make a pattern—is it to find meaning? A meaning beyond the event that extends to others, something that says not only, this happened to me, but this is the meaning of what happened to me. A questionable enterprise, to be sure, for it is a process that ends with one's own life, finite, and inevitably subjective and biased. One keeps reordering the past in the light of one's current insights and so what one sets down are not the facts, but a story. An explanatory myth at worst, an entertaining tale at best.

It need not be a dishonorable enterprise; one can strive for truth without having the illusion that one can find it. One can play with various forms in the hope that when the right one appears, it will be perceived as right. 1 would like to tell the stories and find the pattern that reaches from the past toward the future.

There is one more reason for doing this—our connection with and responsibility toward the dead. As we live on and grow older, the dead stay forever young. No one can remember them older than they were at the time of their death and so we seem, in our own aging, to be marching farther and farther away from them. Yet their immortality lies within us—as long as there are persons living who remember the dead, the dead live on. That is a hopeful thought, the thought embodied in the concept of the resurrection. For the dead do not live on unchanged; they are alive and transformed because they live in the transformed memory of the living. The living select what to remember, and what they select is what had meaning for them in their relationship with the dead person. If the living change, the memory of the dead within them also changes—that is natural and that is good. It is akin to the process are interpreting historical events from the point of view of the living present. It follows the example of some primitive tribes who plant the bones of their dead ancestors in the floor of their houses and who, when they move to new abodes, carry the bones of the ancestors with them.

At the moment of their transformation we swallow the dead; they become parts of us, the living, in a way they never were when they were alive. We now own them as material out of which we make our own life, the way the mushroom appropriates the rotten wood of the tree out of which it continues to grow. The dead have left us and they have entered us to be transformed and become immortal. Well, as immortal as we are ourselves, no more and no less. We are giving them the added space of our own lifetime and perhaps we can, as we ourselves are remembered pass them on to yet another generation. To swallow the past and transform it is to accept it. It is to find balance, perhaps serenity.

What I have chosen to write is a partial autobiography, one that ends in 1958, at the time when I began my life as a historian. This new phase started with a few part-time courses taken at the New School for Social Research, then developed into a B.A. at the New School and my entry into graduate school at Columbia University in 1963. In 1966, I graduated with an M.A. and a Ph.D. from this institzltion, and ever since 1963 I have been a practicing historian. My specialty, the history of women, did not exist as a field of study when I began my career. I started out as an embattled outsider and in thirty-six years of steady effort have been an agent in the transformation of traditional history. My career has brought me rewarding work, professional recognition, acclaim and many public honors. All the books 1 have written since that time have been immediately published and have found a wide readership. Today, Women's History is taught at most academic institutions in this country and is an internationally recognized field of study. I consider myself fortunate to have been a participant and a leader in an intellectual revolution that gave women their history and moved them into the center of intellectual discourse.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades I have been frequently interviewed and questioned about my life and my development as a historian. I have been urged to write the story of "my brilliant career." Yet I have chosen here to tell not the end of the story, but what went before. My academic career is an open book. But I have been silent about my political past during the years of my academic success. And such silence, for all its complex reasons, distorts the truth. Now 1 would like to set the record straight. That is why I have written a political, *a* partial, *autobiography—to explain the roads I have taken, the world in which 1 lived, the choices I have made in that world. The students I have taught, the audiences who have applauded my lectures, the readers who have enjoyed my books, are entitled to know how I became the person they knew and honored. I do not want to end my life within a closet of my own making.*

The quest for living an honest life, a conscious life, has driven me since my adolescence. This enterprise is a part of it. But essentially, whatever the consequences, 1 must do this because I am a creative writer. I write to find out what I know. I write to give form to chaos. And then I must let go, let the work make it on its own, for better or worse.

Long ago, late at night in a New York winter, as my husband Carl and I left after a dinner party, I fell down the icy stoop of the brownstone and landed on my back. People came running to help me, and even as I felt the piercing pain rushing into my brain, I sensed my toes and said, "My back is not broken; I can feel my toes."

"You'll describe your own funeral," Carl said disgustedly as he helped me to my feet.

That's about it. I probably will.

[1]

THE FIRST THINGS I can think of are the breaks, the fissures. I've had too many—destruction, loss, then new beginnings. But every lifetime has losses. I think I have long taken mine too seriously, with a heaviness inappropriate to actuality. Mine were always experienced against a background of uncertainty about human relations, an anticipation of betrayal, abandonment and withdrawal of love, which marked my early childhood and have stayed with me most of my life. This, then, seems to be the place where to begin.

I grew up in a comfortable bourgeois household in Vienna in the 1920s. According to my grandmother's anecdote, my first life experiences were close to disastrous. At the time of my birth, the Viennese were suffering from severe food shortages in the wake of World War I. My mother was unable to nurse me. Whether this was due to her lack of good nutrition or for other reasons I do not know, but I have been told that she would not give up trying. Nursing her first baby meant a great deal to her; in her inexperience and stubbornness she refused to see that the infant was close to dehydration and starvation. According to family legend, Father's mother saved me by insisting that my mother turn me over to a wet nurse for proper nursing. Another anecdote has it that my father, just recently released from the Imperial Austro-Hungarian Army, in which he had served as a medical officer, used his uniform coat to cover bottles of milk he had obtained at black-market prices from farmers in the nearby countryside, so that

his baby could be fed from a bottle. It is quite likely that from the very first weeks of my life I was confused about the availability of food and love, and confused about who my nurturing mother was: mother, father, grandmother or wet nurse.

Family anecdotes and old photos confirm that the ensuing five years were pleasant, comfortable and secure. The puny infant grew into a sturdy child. She was carefully dressed, well nourished, taken for airings in the city's parks or in the sizeable back garden of the house we lived in.

I have few memories of this period. On the whole, I experienced these as the good years, when I was pampered, fondled and approved of, when I was the center of my small world. In fact, these were the years when my parents' marriage was undergoing a severe crisis, which had started shortly after my birth.

They had married for lave, when he was still in the military and she was barely twenty. She came from a merchant family in Budapest, the eldest of three daughters. Her father was a crude and noisily vulgar, self-made man, who at the time my father came on the scene was in one of his wealthy periods. There had been others, when he went bankrupt and disappeared out of town, leaving his timid wife to deal with the creditors and wait until he sent for the family. They had lived in Trieste, and they now lived again in relative splendor in Budapest. When my father, the young officer, asked my mother's father for her hand in marriage, the old man inquired as to his income. My father told him he hoped to buy a pharmacy eventually, but that meanwhile he would take a job. "With what you can earn," the old man mocked him, "you should be able to pay for my daughter's silk stockings." And so he refused to give his permission to the marriage. But it was true love. She took to bed, refused to eat, until finally the old man relented. Better yet, he gave her a fine dowry, tied up in an ironclad contract to her advantage, and a nice wedding.

Ili (Ilona) and Robert began married life in Vienna, where, with the help of his wife's dowry, he purchased a pharmacy in the fashionable First District. Ili was happy; she had escaped her father and with him her confined, unsatisfying life. She had painted as a young girl, but had been discouraged by her father's contempt and mockery. She read voraciously and wanted an artistic and literary life. She had done volunteer work with poor children, and she had notions about woman's emancipation—she thought eventually she would like to work. Meanwhile she hoped to have a fashionable salon, where talented people would meet for good conversation.

My father was struggling to make a success of his business and, quite possibly, he considered her social ambitions extravagant. He fully expected that with

the birth of their first baby she would settle down to domesticity and a family-focused life. After the first year of marriage he informed Ili that they would move into an apartment in his mother's house, and no protest on her part could stop him. He was extremely devoted to his mother, "the good son" of three remaining sons (one had died in a mountaineering accident that was rumored to be a suicide). My father regarded his mother as the model of the dedicated housewife and visited her every day of his life. He saw no good reason why this housing arrangement would not be advantageous and pleasant. But it was a disaster from which the marriage never recovered.

An anecdote my mother used to tell me illustrates the earliest manifestations of her conflict with her mother-in-law. It seems that my mother was an avid fan of Henrik Ibsen's work. After my birth and while she was still lodged in a private sanitorium for a week of post-delivery care, as was the custom of the day for foreign of her class, she announced to my father that she wished to call the baby Hedda, in honor of Hedda Gabler, an Ibsen character. He objected that such a foreign-sounding name was wrong for a Viennese girl and would cause her lifelong embarrassment. My mother agreed to compromise on Hedwig. But the next day he came back to the sanitorium and told her the baby could not be named Hedwig. Mama objects to it, he explained, because she has a cousin by that name who is a thoroughly unpleasant person, and she does not wish to be reminded of her.

"You mean to tell me I cannot name my first child without your mother's interference," Ili exclaimed.

"Approval," he said, trying to calm her down, "not interference. Surely there is no need to create conflict in the family."

They argued for quite a while; then my mother lost patience. "If I can't name my own child, then let chance name her. I'm going to open this magazine, and the first name I see, that will be it."

She opened the magazine on a dancer named Gerda, so that became my name. With Hedwig as my middle name, a middle name I intensely disliked, never used and dropped as soon as I was able to do so.

My mother's persistence can be seen in the fact that my sister, born five and a half years later, was named Nora, after the Ibsen character, without any apparent objections.

Five years into the marriage, Grandmama had more important battles to fight than those over the naming of daughters. She had by then decided that my mother was not a fit wife to her son; moreover, she considered her an unfit mother.

From "rescuing the baby from starvation" on, everything Grandmama did was for the sake of seeing that her son's children had a "proper" upbringing, which she was certain my mother could not and would not provide.

Grandmama's standards were set by a childhood defined by economic need and strict discipline. Born in Breslau, a city in present-day Slovakia that was then a part of the German Reich, she was the eldest daughter of twelve children, ten boys and two girls. The family struggled for lower middle-class status, and the eldest daughter was charged with much of the incessant labor of cooking, baking, sewing and mending for the large brood. She also must have acquired the habit of command over her flock of younger siblings. Early marriage brought her to Vienna, where she soon was in charge of a household of four sons, an adopted daughter and her husband's apprentices, much in the manner of a medieval merchant's wife. My father's father was a wine merchant; his extensive cellar and storerooms began in the basement of his house and were tunneled under the garden. His office thus was a part of the house, and one can only surmise that Grandmama meddled into his affairs with the same determination with which she kept track of her sons' wives and children. Grandfather died before I was born and was reverently held up as a model husband by Grandmama through a ritualized inventory of anecdotes, which I early suspected she had invented.

Had Grandmama been fair to her beautiful young daughter-in-law, she would have noticed that she, too, had been raised by a German-born mother whose cultural background was much like her own. Mother's mother came from Reichenberg, now also in Slovakia, and was proficient in all the domestic arts, as befitted a proper Jewish German girl. But Grandmother Goldie, whom we always simply called "Goldie," omitting the familial title, was a shy, gentle soul who sought only to please those around her. Like Grandmama, she was constantly occupied with "handiwork" and produced knitted and crocheted objects, together with fine-stitch embroidery, sufficient to furnish more households than her three daughters could supply. But my mother had early rejected her own mother's model of domesticity, and instead had chosen to do "serious" work—painting, writing, book-binding, home-decorating—always, of course, as an unpaid amateur. What was puzzling was that Grandmama was perfectly willing to accept the fact that her other daughters-in-law were not full-time housewives and mothers—one was an opera singer, another a pharmacist—and both were welcome family members and regular visitors in Grandmama's home. Only my mother was the outcast, the enemy. I suspect that Grandmama's quarrel with my mother was based less on objective issues than simply on the clash of two strong personalities.

Since the naming incident, my mother had refused to give the older woman deference, and that may have been the sin that could never be forgiven.

As I remember her, Grandmama was a matriarch whose splendid intelligence and energy were entirely devoted to tyrannizing the household and any family members within her reach. She fully expected to win every battle she entered. In own way, so did my mother. Thus, the war between these two women dragged on for twenty or more years; neither of them could win it or let go of it.

We moved into my grandmother's house when I was a baby and stayed there until we left Vienna. It was the only place of my childhood, a three-story apartment house on a quiet residential street on which each house had a large back garden with trees. The two ground-floor apartments were rented out. My grandmother lived on the first floor, and we lived on the second. A superintendent lived with his family in a tiny apartment in the basement. Our apartment, like grandmother's, was ample and beautified, with a living room—we called it a salon—large enough to have four windows fronting the street. There was a large formal dining room, three rooms, a study and two half-enclosed porches. One of these served as a breakfast-sitting room; the other was attached to the kitchen. These porches faced each other at right angles to the apartment at either end. Since my grandmother's sitting porch, on which she spent most of her day, was underneath our kitchen porch, she could watch most of what went on in our apartment. All of our visitors had to pass her door in order to reach ours, and she made it her business to be closely observant of every detail of our lives. This was the world of my early childhood, bounded by rooms, balconies and garden, circumscribed by concepts of childrearing derived in German middle-class culture and devastated by continual conflict.

IN THE "GOOD YEARS" before I was five, I was unconscious of the raging domestic battles and accepted as perfectly natural my daily ceremonious visit to Grandmama. She usually received visitors while seated at the head of a heavy, dark walnut table in her living room, which was situated underneath our salon. She sewed by hand, white on white, with incredibly fine stitches hardly visible to the naked eye, and prided herself on being able to patch sheets so that one could not notice the patches. No matter how humble and domestic grandmother's occupations, she always dressed like a lady and wore gold and diamond rings on her bony, heavy-veined hands. She seemed to the child like a queen sitting on a throne, and one approached her with a mixture of fear and awe. The child was expected to curtsy upon entering the room, kiss Grandmama's cheek, receive a pat

on the shoulder or the head and answer each of the questions rapidly put to her. "Sit down," Grandmama would start, "don't fidget. What did you do this morning? What did you eat for lunch? Was your mother home for lunch? Have you been an obedient child? Did you have your daily walk?" And so on.

Mercifully, *Tante* Emma would interrupt this interrogation and remind Grandmama that the child probably wanted some cookies and milk. Grandmama was a fine cook and took great pride in her hospitality. "A cookie and milk" was more likely to be a full meal during which *Tante* Emma would usually find something pleasant to talk about. Diminutive and very kind, *Tante* Emma, grandmother's adopted daughter, devoted her life to being the old lady's constant companion. One learned later that she was a spinster, which explained her traditional role in the family as unpaid retainer, devoted servant acolyte and long-suffering recipient of the old lady's frustrations and bad temper. But the child thought of her as the good fairy in the fairy tales, plump, jolly and always up to something nice. She was a person of great goodness who treated a child as a child and never made any demands in return, and so she became one of the few reliable anchors of my childhood. It was because of her that the ceremonious and inquisitorial visits with Grandmama were made tolerable, even pleasant. Grandmama's apartment, with its dark furniture and heavy velvet drapes, its perennial smell of mothballs and food, its aura of old age, stuffiness and censure, stood in contrast with the bright, modern apartment that represented Mother's domain. Sooner or later I would have to choose between these two worlds

My earliest memories are of being bad. My governess and I shared a small room in which, each evening, a black iron coal stove gave off a friendly light as a background for my nightly sponge bath in a basin of warm water. By morning, the stove was black and cold, and the room was nearly as cold as the outdoors, for my father was convinced that our good health depended on sleeping with open windows, summer or winter. At the time of my first memory, I was nude, waiting for my Fräulein, who was filling the washbasin in the kitchen. While she was out of the room I did something I knew was forbidden: I opened the bottom drawer of the big wardrobe, which held Fräulein's clothing. There was nothing remarkable in it, and I tried quickly to close it, as I heard her footsteps in the hall. The drawer stuck and I could not budge it. In confusion and fear I backed up against the wall near the stove, too upset even to realize I was touching the hot stove and getting burned. "That's your punishment for being bad," Fräulein said, smearing Vaseline on the red marks on my buttocks, which now hurt fiercely. Yes, I deserved it and it served me right, I felt as I cried in pain and shame.

There were, in my world, many rules and regulations, and the child learned them unquestioningly; still, she learned badness together with obedience. The rules were arbitrary and often senseless, and one followed them simply because adults had the power and the will to punish. From the incident with the drawer I learned that badness is immediately followed by punishment; that hot coal stoves burn when you touch them; and that, if you are going to be bad, you'd better be sure not to get caught.

Other badness was more complex and more damaging. My little room connected with a door to the room that was then my parents' bedroom. Sometimes at night I was awakened by my parents' voices, arguing. I could not understand what was said, but it frightened me and I called out. Then one of them would come to my room and comfort me in a low, even-toned voice and assure me that I had been frightened by nothing more serious than a dream. But there were other times when I heard their voices when I did not cry out, but instead tiptoed to the door and pressed my ear against it. Sometimes I could understand what they were saying. Once I heard myself referred to—the child. My mother's voice: "I'll never give up the child."

My father's: "Mama can take care of her." (I knew this meant Grandmama.)

"Never. Never."

I ran back to bed and buried my head under the pillow. I did not want to hear more of these terrible words. Sometimes later, Fräulein caught me listening at the door. "*Der Horcher an der Wand hört seine eigene Schand,*" she immediately quoted the appropriate adage. Fräulein was always full of adages. He who listens at the wall, hears talk of his own disgrace. I blushed to the roots of my hair. Of course, my father wanted to get rid of me because of my badness and give me to Grandmama, who was strict. But Mother wouldn't give me up, never.

How much later it was that I found out my mother was pregnant I do not know. She made me listen to something by pressing my ear against her round, hard belly, saying it would be my little brother and wasn't it lovely that we would now have a little brother with whom I could play. "Where is the little brother now," I wanted to know.

"In Mummy's stomach, where you used to be before you were born." This kind of silliness could be dismissed as the nonsense parents say to children, when they don't want to tell them the real truth. That the stork would bring baby brother from the store, as Fräulein told me, made much better sense. "But I'll always love my little girl," said Mother, hugging me against her funny big belly.

I was five and a half years old when my sister was born. I had waited long and

intently for baby brother, and then they said there would be no baby brother, but a nice baby sister who could play with me much better than any brother could. Wasn't that nice? No, it wasn't, especially since Mother was gone somewhere and Fräulein said she would be leaving soon, too, now that baby was here, because there would be a nanny for the baby. The nanny would be nice, and she would take care of me and wash me and take me for walks and do everything for me that Fräulein had done. And then Mother came home with a blanket bundle carried by a nurse in a stiff white uniform with a blue veil on her head. Mother looked funny and went straight to bed. And when the child asked to see the baby, she was shown a glimpse of something tiny and wrinkly and red inside the blanket, and the tiny thing opened up its mouth and screamed so loudly it sounded worse than howling cats.

"The baby is not too well," said the nurse, "and you mustn't come near it. Baby needs to sleep now, and you be a good girl and play quietly. And let Mother rest."

And that's how everything changed and became absolutely horrible. My room had been taken away and Father now slept in it. Mother was alone in the parents' bedroom, mostly lying still in her big bed, often crying; she was very sick. The new children's room, which I now shared with baby and Nanny, was a large, sunny corner room next to my mother's. But I was not allowed to go into Mother's room, unless she called me, which she didn't, because of her sickness.

Baby sister was also very sick. She lived in a basket cradle with a curtain all around it, and I must never never come near baby's bed because of her sickness. Baby cried all the time she was awake, sometimes whirnpery and sometimes angry-shrill. She had boils full of pus all over her body and looked like the gruesome toad from the fairy tale. The doctor came each morning, and I was sent out of the room. ''Just be good and make no noise." I sat under the piano in the salon and sometimes behind the big upholstered chair in the library. The library adjoined the salon on the one side, the children's room on the other. Its huge book-filled shelves muffled the sounds from the children's room, and as I watched the comings and goings of various people I understood very little of what was happening. Nanny carrying basins and pails from the room to the kitchen and, on returning, carrying clean towels and a tray; Father and the baby doctor coming out of the room looking worried. The maid going in and coming out with a pail full of disgusting, yellow-red liquid. Sometimes I crept close to the door that led to the children's room and took up my old habit of listening at walls, more guilty than ever, but I heard nothing said about myself. Everyone seemed to have forgotten my existence.

Each day, the baby doctor took a sharp knife and opened up one of the baby's boils, drained out the pus and changed the dressing. The next day he went on to the next boil—it all had a funny name, furunculous, and maybe baby sister would die. Nanny believed in scientific explanations and was unstinting in her description. She even brought me in to show me "poor baby." Baby sister, when you removed the pretty lace-edged blanket from her crib, was a mummy doll wrapped in yellow bandages (they were soaked in some sort of yellow cream to promote healing), and the only thing living about her was an always angry red monkey face. "And now go out to the porch and play, I have to get some food into poor baby."

Clearly, everyone was a liar. They had promised me a baby brother to play with, and instead they had brought some crazy sick baby who screamed all the time and would never play with anybody. The best thing would be if she died. I thought dying meant going away, out of my life.

But then they kept talking about how *Mutti* would die, too. Mitzi, the cook, and Nanny talked about it all the rime and forgot I was there to hear it. And Father talked about it sometime, mostly to admonish me to play quietly and not to cry and not to ask for food and not to ask for *Mutti.*

Another doctor with a grey beard came every day to see *Mutti* and to cut things on her. Then Nanny would be running into *Mutti's* room carrying trays and towels and would emerge from the room with pails full of blood and pus. One time I sneaked into the open door while the doctor was there and saw him bending over Mother's breast and pressing on it; pus came out and Mother screamed and I screamed. Father carried me out angrily and pushed me into the kitchen. "Can't you mind . . ."

"Her milk turned bad," said Mitzi, "and she gave it to the baby." Which made *Mutti* into some kind of wicked witch, poisoning her baby, but I didn't care because she never called for me and had forgotten me. This went on for weeks, perhaps months. At a time when antibiotics were unknown, women did indeed die of puerperal fever and mastitis, and babies died of birth-related infections, and the only cure known was drainage and salves and hot compresses and rest. And healthy little girls, caught in such a family tragedy, were the last thing anyone had time to worry about.

So I became bad, worse than ever before. Sometimes they forgot to give me a meal and I screamed and whined; at other times I would refuse to eat what was set before me. When I was ordered out of a room, I stalled, and when I was carried out I kicked and bit and clawed. I cried for Fräulein, who had after all taken care of me for three years and who had abandoned me as well. I did not like

Nanny, and she did not like me. One day when I acted up, she slapped me across the face and then again across the rump. After that I was afraid of Nanny and was very good with her and very obedient, for I had never been slapped before.

Mother was out of danger first. The doctor came only twice a week and he no longer cut her, and then he stopped coming altogether and Mother, still quite weak, sat up in a chair with a warm blanket around her shoulders. And sometimes, she would let me come into her room and play on the rug near her chair, and then it seemed almost like old times.

The baby improved, too, after sixty-four boils had been cut—Nanny supplied the number with pride, as some sort of achievement. The day came when baby could be out of bandages. Nanny unwrapped her with great care (I had noticed, all during these weeks, the patient care she gave the baby; no slapping the baby when she cried). Long coils of yellow wrapping trailed to the floor. It was like one of those surprise gift balls you unwrap and in the center there is a tiny doll. Nanny collected the bandages in the pail and went out to get warm water for the baby's bath. "Stay here," she said to me in a friendly tone. "Be a good girl and mind the baby."

No crying now. I bent over the crib and there, lying on a white flannel blanket, was the prettiest small creature with perfect arms and hands and legs and toes, all waving in the air. Her skin was pink, but it had marks where the boils had been. As I looked at this transformation in wonder, a sort of awe came over me. I had never really seen a baby. I picked up the rattle tied to the crib and held it where the baby could see, and I watched as her dark eyes turned to it. She had lots of black hair, and her face was pink and relaxed; she no longer looked like an angry monkey. Suddenly, as her eyes focused on the rattle, she smiled and became so beautiful, so marvelous—

I suddenly understood that I loved this baby and was sorry for her because of all the marks on her skin and the pain. I'll take care of you, I pledged silently. I'm your big sister, and I'm so glad you're not dead.

"The baby smiled at me," I told Nanny when she came into the room. "I made her smile."

And I thought, now everything will be good again, the way it was. And maybe better.

I WAS WRONG about that. It never again was the way it had been; that is inevitable when a new baby comes into the family. That classical drama, the dethronement of the first-born, was irreversible, but it was made much worse in

our situation by the complex undercurrent of what the birth of that child meant to our parents. The story was told to me by my mother when I was in my early teens, and since it is a story that does not much accrue to her credit, I have no doubt as to its truth. She told it in a number of versions, one of which made her seem more of a victim; another made her seem more active and aggressive in her drive for self-realization. Regardless, the facts, as closely as I can gather, were that she was greatly disappointed in her situation and miserably unhappy in her marriage in the years of my early childhood. In this mood, she had a brief affair, which my father discovered. She asked for a divorce, but my father insisted that if she went ahead with it, he would keep "the child." (Click, click went my memory—"Mama will take the child"). Anyway, according to prevailing law, she would lose the child, being the "guilty party." Having no means of support and not wanting to lose her child, she gave up the idea of a divorce. Perhaps there was a genuine reconciliation—despite my mother's various bitter accounts of what was done to her, I know that my father deeply loved her and continued to love her all her life, and in a way she loved him, too. They could not live together harmoniously, and they could not live apart. After the reconciliation, life resumed normally, and in due course my sister was born. They must have hoped that this new birth would bring a strengthened marriage, but the severe stresses of the first months of desperate illness of both mother and baby must have strained their relationship beyond endurance. They had separate bedrooms after the birth of my sister, and several years later they drew up a legal contract. I do not know exactly under what circumstances this astonishing document was drawn up. I saw it as a teenager, and I knew from my own experience that they lived by it the rest of their lives. The contract provided that husband and wife agreed to maintain joint residence and the appearances of a conventional marriage, with both carrying out the responsibilities of raising their children, but that they would each be free to have their own lives, as long as they were discreet in their conduct. My mother was specifically granted several months of vacation time away from home each year. Her dowry, which had been placed in my father's business and which formed the bulk of his business capital, would stay so invested, but in turn my father had to support her "in proper style" and set aside the interest from this investment of her capital for her own use. These latter provisions had been stipulated by her father when he had settled the dowry on her.

I have long sought to comprehend what went into the making of a document so much closer to a marriage contract among feudal clans than to a financial settlement of an emancipated modern couple. Obviously, the proper upbringing of

the children was a main concern of my father, as was the keeping up of appearances. My mother's version of my father's motives was that he wanted propriety more than anything else. This may be true, but it was not the whole truth, for my father was a truly good man. His later actions, especially in the Hitler years and the years of her terminal illness, belie such a version and leave no doubt that he truly loved her. Most likely he hoped that by tying her to him and to the children, he would bring about the change he hoped for so desperately, that she would become a respectable and reliable wife and mother.

But what about her—how could she have agreed to and abided by such a humiliating contract? She always explained that she did it for the sake of the children, because she did not want to lose the children and knew she would have to in case of a divorce. For the many years when I was her loyal, partisan defender, I believed this explanation and accepted as my due the burden of guilt it put upon me for wrecking my mother's life. She also said that since she was unschooled and untrained, she had no choice; she could not make a living alone. I no longer believe either of these explanations is sufficient. Even in her own circle, there was her younger sister Manci, at that very time studying to be a doctor. A few years later Manci divorced her first husband and lived an independent life, supporting herself and her mother. Sometimes in those years, there ensued a bitter quarrel between these two sisters having to do with money, and to the end of their lives they barely saw each other. I've often puzzled over the connection between my mother's attitude toward money and dependency and that quarrel with her independent sister. Since all the participants are dead, I will never know.

As for my mother, the contract gave her a kind of power. She firmly believed that at any time, if she withdrew her dowry from my father's business, he would be ruined. Even as a teenager, I could see this myth for an illusion, for by then my father was quite well-to-do and could have easily weathered the withdrawal of her dowry from his business, but to her this fond illusion offered a surrogate for the power to be self-defined and self-supporting. It seems to me most likely that my mother was afraid of becoming independent, that she liked what the contract gave her—comfortable support and some freedom without all the responsibilities of independence.

All of which the six year old did not know, but still she felt its reverberations. The room arrangement: "Mother's room" was redecorated soon after her recovery, in a modern style, its brick red, woven curtains covering one full wall, its fireplace lined with jet black tiles, a desk and tubular steel chair transforming the bedroom

into a studio-sitting room, Now her room was marked off from the rest of the apartment in a distinctive and private way. The children were not permitted into her room, except by her invitation. If one wanted to see one's mother, one did not just knock at the door; one had to make an appointment. When one was invited to the room, one was treated quite formally as an adult, which was delightful. One might be offered a cup of tea with milk, and Mother would talk about things no one else ever talked of to a child. She might take down a book from the shelves above her bed, and we might together look at pictures of paintings. She might read some poetry; she might tell a story. Time in her room was a special, treasured treat.

Father's room was in the small study adjoining; the connecting door to Mother's room was locked. Father's room became crowded and ugly; he permitted no one to make it neat. Papers and magazines were stacked high on the floor and on the cluttered desk. Father welcomed early morning romps in his bed; he was quite open to children's visits, but he was not in the room very often, as he left early and came home late.

The geography of the apartment reflected the strange structure of the family's life. The salon, a huge formal living room with grand piano, upholstered furniture and Persian rugs, was used mostly for social gatherings and for the chamber music evenings that were regular monthly events. The library adjoining it at one end was a comforting place where I could sit and read and even occasionally chance to meet a parent. The dining room, which adjoined the salon at the opposite end, was furnished with heavy carved walnut chairs with upright backs that looked appropriate to an English castle. This was the stage on which family dinners were enacted. According to Central European custom, the main meal of the day was a late lunch over which Father presided. At the dining table, children were cautioned not to speak unless spoken to. To me, these ceremonious meals seemed quite early to be scenes of warfare. The battlefield of the dining table became the stage for my earliest rebellion: refusal to eat what was offered, bad table manners, incessant teasing of my little sister, boisterous explosions of chattering alternating with surly withdrawal. The punishments for these infractions were endless and tedious, and also quite ineffective.

Nothing was ever again as it had been, and the most obvious sign of this was Mother's withdrawal. She spent less and less time at home and with the children; and she transformed herself into a fashionable lady, quite remote from the woman she was at home. The fashionable lady inhabited "Mommy's city," a mysterious region where she met her friends. Sometimes, in the early years, her women friends came to visit her at home of an evening-lovely creatures, mostly younger

than she was, artists, dancers, writers. They drank tea in her room and smoked cigarettes, chatting long into the night in ways that seemed mysterious and attractive, but which totally excluded the coarse world of bumbling children with dirty socks and scruffy clothes, forever hungry for sweets and noisily concerned with school and soccer games. The daily care of the children was given over to governess, and Mother kept her supervising of that care to a minimum. The spontaneous invitations for visits to her room and her always unscheduled appearances in the children's room were infrequent, much longed-for treats. Her unavailability was the predominant theme of those years and so the child, frequently disappointed and rebuffed, finally transferred allegiance to the governess.

The governess who followed upon Nanny with the iron hands was a kind, intelligent, warm person who stayed for five years. We called her Bebe—she was a true substitute mother for all that time, the one person about whom all memories are good and warming. She was fun; she loved children; she played games and taught skills and was always available, satisfying the greed of even this neediest of all children. She was, in fact, a trained kindergarten teacher and was studying to become a child psychologist. Bebe, if she could have stayed another five years, might have set everything to rights, acting as buffer, mediator, mother surrogate.

She made of the children's room a safe refuge, an island in that sea of warfare, where everything was bright and joyous and serene. This room was beautifully decorated with stenciled wallpaper on which horses ran through stylized gardens and fields of brown and yellow and green. The same colors and motifs appeared on the storage wall with its closets and chest-of-drawers and toy shelves, on the custom-made tiles of the large woodstove, on the scatter rugs and curtains. My bed and that of my sister, Nora, stood head to foot along one wall, opposite the storage wall. At night, Bebe pulled out a folding bed and slept beside us. There was a round table with four chairs and a cheery yellow lamp, which was the place where friendly meals, games and homework were centered.

And more and more, little sister made her presence felt. Once recovered, she quickly made up for lost ground and became a bright, funny toddler who had a gift for making herself liked by everyone. Perhaps because of the embattled start of her life, she managed to make Father and Mother focus on her. On walks, they each held her hand; they admired her and praised her and repeated with pride the "cute things" she was saying. Perhaps even this late it is the dethroned child in me remembering things in that way; perhaps none of it happened like that, and my anger and jealousy are still coloring my perceptions. But that is how I remem-