

ON THE SAME DAY that Czar Alexander II was blown to bits a few miles from the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, my great-grandmother screamed, "I'm dying, I'm dying!" in the back room of her wooden house in the town of Volkovisk, and my grandfather was born into history.

This was March, 1881.

This was his birthright: bombs, blood, shattered glass.

All his life spasms of violence would wrack his time. History would not mean for him to be gentle. He would not mean to argue with history, but he was a man of character and had no choice.

Character begins in the womb. The struggle to be one's self begins in that dark, jostling carriage, a nine-month ride that ends finally in an explosion not unlike the blast that brought Alexander's coach crashing to the cobblestones, the felled horses bleating like terrified babies. In his mother's womb, my grandfather was already a child of turmoil, already learning to withstand the convulsions of the world.

His mother: I have one picture of her, the paper so riddled with cracks that her young face looks prematurely aged. As if an entire life has been compressed into a single image. Her name was Simca Lieb, and she was a professional mourner. A woman paid to wail at funerals, paid to sit on the hill above the grave of the dead and sing to the ghosts. The dead required reassurance. Having relinquished their bones, the dead listened for the living who chanted, *You are still among us, you are still here*. To Simca Lieb, the dead sang to her in return, though others less attuned to their voices could have mistaken those responses for wind, or crows, or the gravedigger's shovel ringing against the rocky earth.

How did she come to such a vocation? When did my great-grandmother first acknowledge her talent for sorrow, first discover the immense range of her grief?

She is five years old, sweeping out the shed where her father keeps his hoes and rakes. He is in the yard, scattering seed to the chickens. "Look, Simca!" he calls to her as they work. "Look at the moon!"

The moon in the morning? What should a child make of such an aberration? She comes to the door to witness the sky's confusion. Has

God forgotten the order of things, is he changing the rules of the universe? *There are miracles*, she has heard her father say. *And curses*. Which is this? This collapse of distinction between night and day. The chickens are running in circles, colliding with each other: are they, too, befuddled by the sight of the moon in the morning sky?

No. Two drunken peasants have wandered into the yard, their dirty boots kicking up dust and seed. One of the men kicks at each chicken into which he blunders, and the injured creatures flap their helpless wings. Simca climbs up on a barrel to stare through the cobwebbed window. Her father's voice flies out of his mouth to Heaven—Aiii! Aiii!—and Simca sends up her own cry only to find it lodged like a nail at the base of her throat. When at last the strangers stumble from the yard, her father looks like a huge slaughtered chicken on the blood-drenched ground.

For three days Simca did not utter a word, and it was feared she would never speak again. But on the fourth day she began a week of faint moans, much like the cries of a newborn kitten, and then the moans grew in intensity and volume until finally, two weeks after her father's murder, Simca was screaming the way she had tried to scream in the shed. It was less a cry of terror than a cry of loss. It incorporated into its timber the acceptance of death. It contained no plea for help, nor any conviction that help was possible. It was the mourner's cry, and it caused Simca's mother, exhausted by her own bereavement, to say, "She has lost her childhood now," and believing her daughter now knew all the world had to teach about suffering, believing there was no more comfort she could offer her daughter, she rose at last from her vigil by the side of Simca's bed and began, once again, the rituals of her now husbandless household.

Thus abandoned, Simca developed a stoop and the slow gait of melancholia, became known as the "girl with the long face," and began to turn up in the village at funerals of people she did not know. It was her apprenticeship. As the rabbi intoned the *kaddish* and rocked to a rhythm Simca came to understand was the continual shuddering of the dead in their graves, as the relations wept with what Simca came to learn was their small allotment of tears from God's endless supply, as she heard over and over again the first clod of earth heaved against each coffin's lid until she realized that the thud was part of an endless ceremonial beating upon the scarred drum of eternity, as all these things became clear to Simca in ways for which she had no words, she opened

herself to her calling as an artist assents to the colors burning behind her eyes or the music rising through the long columns of her bones or the poems reading themselves aloud in the silent realm of her heart.

The mourner married a revolutionary.

Of Isaac Lieb there is also one picture, but so yellowed he is a blur, nothing remains but the fact of his bulk and the aristocratic posture with which he faced the camera's smoky discharge. At fifteen he had become a tailor's assistant, replacing the tailor's own son who had left Volkovisk for Lodz, where he was involved in what the tailor nervously referred to as "activities." Inside the son's abandoned workbench, Isaac discovered a cache of socialist pamphlets, a dog-eared *Das Kapital* in Yiddish translation, protest poems copied on scraps of paper. A rebel's library. Isaac's political education. He read late at night, after he finished with the daily buttonholes and hems, the mending, the occasional alteration, the infrequent construction of a new garment for one of the local merchants who brought a piece of wool or a length of cotton cloth or a few yards of linen sent by a wealthy relative in Vilnius or Kiev. Laboring one night over such a project—a linen smock to be embroidered around the neckline and sleeves with rosettes and worn at her daughter's wedding by the shoemaker's wife—Isaac Lieb saw in the rippling white fabric the milk for which hungry Russian babies cried, and saw in the rosettes which he had woven with fine scarlet thread the blood of Jews and peasants pitted against each other by the Czar's soldiers, and seeing the wedding smock transformed in his very hands into a tapestry of injustices, Isaac raised his scissors in the air and brought them down in great slashes through the newly-finished blouse, until there was nothing left of it but a mound of ragged strips piled by his feet on the scrap-littered floor.

"Cossacks!" he said, when the tailor cried out for the perpetrator of the garment's destruction. "If I hadn't run them off, everything in the shop would have been ruined!" The tailor gave Isaac a raise, and as Isaac accepted the reward for his lie, he appeared humble and grateful. But inside himself his arm hoisted the scissors again and again. At seventeen, Isaac had become a revolutionary.

In the spring, his mother died of influenza—he himself had been sick for weeks with a lesser bout, his chest ached from coughing, when he walked he hugged his ribs as if he had just been beaten—and the family buried her in the rain. Simca had spread a burlap tarp on her place on the hill and covered herself with another that she had dipped at home

in paraffin which had dried into a waterproof sheen. Thus protected, she sat at her mourning post and watched the Lieb family slosh through the mud to the grave site. The father and three sons bore the coffin; one of the brothers had to stop every few steps to clear his congested lungs. As they moved closer to her, Simca could hear the others pleading with the sick one to drop his share of the burden and she could see his hand grip his mother's bier more and more resolutely, his shoulder on which the pine box rested seeming to form new muscles as he walked. *His eyes*, she thought, seeing how they fixed on a place beyond any landmark, *they are looking for death*. And when her trembling abated, she thought, *As are mine*.

For the first time since her father's murder, Simca felt the stirrings of kinship, a fluttering in her belly not unlike the first movements of a child in the womb.

*Brother*, she named Isaac Lieb before she had spoken a word to him. *Husband*.

This is their wedding night: It is winter in Volkovisk, and a veil of snow covers each rickety house and shed and shop, each market stall, each gravestone in the cemetery, hitching post, garden plot, stone well, the main pump, each dirt road that winds now like a silk ribbon through the town. Volkovisk looks less like a town than a memory of a town, or a dream of a town not yet created. Looking out the window as Isaac sits on the edge of her bed—they will live in her mother's house, this will be their room, the mother is spending the night at a neighbor's—hearing him undo the laces of his boots, Simca thinks, *This is not real, I am not here, this is not my life*. Either because she is too excited or because she is too afraid, or probably both, she grips the shutter when he comes to stand behind her, wills herself through the glass and across the frigid earth to the stone slab under which her father lies in his unrelenting silence—he is the one ghost who refuses to answer her song of lament with his own—wills herself there and kneels in the virgin snow and remains there all night, safe in her familiar isolation, glad to be cold and separate again. Even though Isaac believes she is with *him* in the bed on which their bodies fuse, she thinks triumphantly, *I am not here*. Afterwards, when Isaac wipes her wet cheeks with his palm, Simca is shocked to find that she has been weeping, for she does not weep in the cemetery, she wails but she does not weep. Weeping belongs to a life which is not

hers anymore, which died with her childhood that day in the shed, and she kisses his salty hand over and over again to taste, for the first time since her father's murder, her own tears, sour and warm.

*Wife*, thinks Isaac, savoring what he believes to be her passion for him: *You are my wife.*

Months passed. In spite of the gift of tears, Simca remained unable to follow her body into the realm of pleasure. Her mouth would cry out, her limbs would grow supple as the reeds which swayed at the river's edge, and in the place where Isaac entered her, she would feel herself change into water, feel the waves grow wild and high, then ebb, becalmed to the depths. Yet even then some crucial piece of herself, as on the first night, remained chaste, unmoved, wed only to that early grief. Although Isaac did not complain about his wife's ultimate estrangement, she was sure he sensed it. She consulted the rabbi's wife, who recommended her tonics and promised special prayers. In the cemetery she confided in those spirits whose earthly lives had been particularly lusty, but they had already forgotten their flesh and could give her no advice.

After a year she grew fearful that Isaac had taken a mistress. Surely he was yearning for someone who did not stand partly outside the bedroom like a boarder sitting in the kitchen after the family members have all gone to sleep. Where did he *really* go two and three nights a week after putting in twelve-hour days in the tailor's shop? Political meetings, he told her. Secret discussions. She believed him less and less, and finally one evening she followed him through the darkened town to what she was sure was a rendezvous with the glazier's widow. Simca followed him as quietly as the ghost she believed herself to be, three-quarters of a mile to Lev Kolsky's blacksmith shop. In the doorway, Lev greeted Isaac with a kiss on each cheek and ushered him into the dim store, one small oil lamp burning under Lev's worktable. She hid herself in the bushes beneath the window and watched. The eight men sat on the floor in a circle and their shadowy forms melded together so that Simca could not tell where one man began and the other ended, so that only the circle itself had definable substance, and each man's voice was only as real as the voice to which it responded or to which it directed a question. Words broke free of sentences and flew past her ear: *oppression, exploitation, proletariat, ideology*. The man spoke the foreign

language with fluency and zeal. They understood each other as Simca and her ghosts understood each other. They were—oh, she saw it clearly in the way their eyes glittered more brightly than the lantern could possibly account for!—*enraptured*.

She had been wrong, and right. There was no other woman. But in Lev Kolsky's night-shrouded shop, she had witnessed her husband's clandestine romance: he was in love with history, he possessed it as he would a mistress, with the blind erotic dedication of a lover.

She turned her eyes from the window. *He will be killed the way my father was killed*. She walked home. Her mother was already asleep. Simca put on her best muslin gown and waited for Isaac in their bed. Hours later, when he returned from the meeting of the Volkovisk *Bund*, she whispered to her husband, "I am here, Isaac," meaning *Now this is real, this is my life*, and my grandfather, Nathan Lieb, was conceived.

Simca's mother was elated that her daughter was pregnant. The old woman had long feared that her daughter was less alive than other people in the town. Sometimes the old woman would question Ilka Blum, the proprietor of the *mikva*, "Does she look . . . healthy? I mean, does everything seem, well, the way it should in a young girl, I mean, normal?" Ilka, who had worked at the ritual bathhouse behind the synagogue for thirty-two years, assured the old woman over and over again that Simca was ". . . nice and clean and nothing growing and nothing shriveled up. Believe me, soon the house will be full of grandchildren, she won't have any more time for funerals and graves."

No time for funerals and graves? The old woman reminded Ilka that she could no longer bake the fifty loaves of *challah* each week whose sale for the Sabbath had long supported her and Simca. The old woman worried Isaac's salary would not be sufficient for the three of them. Ilka Blum counseled, "Let the girl take in laundry, then."

One night the old woman dreamed of Simca hauling bushel after bushel of wet laundry to the cemetery, draping each gravestone with the shirts and dresses and trousers and nightgowns, even with the underwear, of the residents of Volkovisk. Around the perimeter of the cemetery, the naked townspeople cried out for their clothes, but Simca admonished them: "The dead are cold, they need your garments more than you do!" and she continued to wend her way through the maze of burial markers she knew with the authority of a long-time citizen,

distributing apparel to the invisible populace with whom she so easily conversed.

Many mornings now Simca had to stay in bed, sipping hot water and lemon, nibbling on a piece of dry toast, waiting for the noon hour when the nausea ceased. As if her body were not in league with the earth's rotation around the sun. As if her body, after years of being adrift in numbness, were now connected to the rhythms of the living sensate world. She felt disloyal withdrawing so much energy from sorrow. The disembodied were her compatriots as surely as the members of the *Bund* were Isaac's, yet here she was attending to her physical self with a seriousness that bordered on obsession. It was not simply that her abdomen was changing from its familiar flat plane into an expanding globe, the weight of which pressed down on her bladder and shot flashing pain down her thighs and tugged at the small of her back. Her skin darkened, and she studied her face daily in the mirror, marking the advance of the altered pigmentation. Her ankles and fingers swelled, and she soaked them in tubs of hot water. She broke out into sweats on the coolest of days. Sometimes she was so hungry that she wanted to grab the food from the plates of Isaac and her mother, and eat all their portions herself; sometimes the smell of cooked meat drove her from the table to vomit up the last meal she had eaten. Her breasts doubled in size and her inverted pale nipples turned full and brown. Sometimes a small misfortune—the end of a somber dream, or the sight of a delicate insect entrapped in a spider's web, or a piece of crockery slipping accidentally from her wet hands—triggered in Simca depths of sadness that not even years among graves had been able to touch, and she would sob for hours, as if the very world itself had shattered at her feet.

But more often, Isaac would tell a joke or a neighbor's child would make a funny face or the cat would brush by and tickle her leg, and Simca would embark on a fit of laughter so prolonged, it was as if she had entered a state in which all the joy she had denied herself since childhood had accumulated in a secret pouch beneath her heart and was now releasing itself in a great rush of happiness throughout her body. On the days she was able to get to the cemetery, she felt a double sense of betrayal: first, to the spirits whose language she seemed to be forgetting, and second, to the baby inside her who seemed to grow as still as death when Simca came to mourn. When Isaac returned home on those days, she would have him put his ear to her belly to listen for the baby's heart, and she began to realize, toward the end of her term,

that she would spend the rest of her earthly existence torn between the demands of the living and the needs of the dead, with no sense of where her true allegiance lay, exhausted by her confusion, more alone than ever.

When you were three months old, Isaac announced, “We are moving to Vilnius.”

Simca was nursing you when Isaac delivered what for her was a decree of banishment, and suddenly your tiny head began to root around as if in search of a third breast: the moment that Isaac had spoken, Simca’s milk had dried up. She swore she actually felt the ducts around her nipples close, actually witnessed her laden breasts diminish in size by half. You howled for days. The scalded milk she fed you with a spoon did not appease your deeper hunger for the body to which you were still attached in your imagination, and you would push your tongue against the metal bowl in an effort to expel what for you was an alien substance, an absolutely inadequate substitution for the soft familiar flesh you craved, whose texture and smell you still retained in the constant dream that is our infancy. Simca spent hours by the stove in the kitchen, applying hot compresses to her atrophied breasts, but she knew the treatments were irrelevant. The dead residents of Volkovisk who depended on Simca for news and encouragement and the kind of attention that made invisibility bearable had heard Isaac’s announcement. Taking her milk, she knew, was just their first tactic in keeping her with them. Nights she could hardly sleep, waiting for blindness or paralysis or the sudden loss of all her long auburn hair which Isaac, in defiance of Jewish tradition, had implored her not to cut. It did not matter to the dead that Simca *wanted* to stay; they were beyond the consolations of intent, they existed solely in the less-subtle dimension of action, and Simca’s protestations that leaving Volkovisk was not her idea or desire failed to move their buried hearts. They felt abandoned, and they were striking out at her in the first throes of their grief, as the living often curse the corpse of one they have needed and loved.

Isaac Lieb could not understand his wife’s hysteria. She had never been happy in Volkovisk. She did not socialize with the other women at the well, or at the market, and she did not chat with them in the women’s section of the synagogue or join in the gossip they traded in whispers even as the rabbi read aloud from the Torah. As for her work



as a mourner, didn't she come home silent and despondent, didn't it take her a good hour to recover from the morbid occupation into which she had stumbled for want of better opportunities in such a provincial town? When Simca tried to speak to Isaac about her conversations with the dead, he would tell her, "The Revolution does not have time for phantoms, Simca." And he would begin his lectures which sometimes lasted half the night about the socialism of Marx and Bakunin and Tkachev and a society where being a Jew did not result in a little girl watching her father being hacked to death. Simca would listen with the concentration of a child who *may* be fixed on the adult's words, or possibly enthralled during the oration with the speaker's eye movements, or a birthmark shaped like a butterfly, or the way in which the adult's jaw hinges and unhinges with each syllable. But whether she actually learned anything from Isaac is debatable: it was *Isaac* who commanded her attention, his presence, the facts of his body and voice. *Brother. Husband.* Of his mistress, Politics, she wanted to know as little as possible, but she never told him that, and so he continued to try to bring them together, mistress and wife in intimate relation, and Simca continued her silent resistance to such a *ménage*.

What he had not told her was that he had decided to move to Vilnius ever since that day three months earlier, the day of your birth, when the group of urban radicals who called themselves the People's Will had finally succeeded in assassinating Alexander II. Holding his newborn infant in his arms, Isaac vowed to you, Grandfather, to break free of the *shtetl*— the wooden house, the cemetery, the tailor's bench, Lev Kolsky's blacksmith shop—, to leave Volkovisk for good where time seemed to lie as still as a stagnant pool, to bring his child into the city, into the rushing waters of ideas and events, into the Revolution, into what Isaac Lieb truly believed would be the great and glorious liberation of history.

2

It is true: all I have of Simca and Isaac are the photographic distortions my mother found in the top bureau drawer in my grandfather's room, Jewish Home for the Aged and Infirm, Boston, January, 1951. Not even anecdotes fed to me in my childhood on whose words I could have suckled long after the other weaning had taken place. On the subject of his parents, my grandfather was silent. But I have come to learn that

every word we utter pronounces the names of our fathers and mothers, and they, in turn, speak through our mouths, their voices ride on our breath like boats skimming the river's skin.

Grandfather, I remember the parents you sheltered in your bones. Simca slept in your right eye, Isaac in your left. When I would put my ear to yours as if it were a seashell in which I might have heard the ocean's depths, I heard your father and your mother whispering to each other. And when we walked together in the park, Grandfather, you sagged beneath the weight of your parents making their journey across your shoulder's span: all your life they traveled on your back.

You were still an infant when they arranged for the trip to Vilnius: two days in a crowded, airless train. The day before the planned departure, Simca took you on a shorter pilgrimage. That morning she bathed you with particular care, and in the metal washtub you relaxed for the first time in the tepid water. One of her hands under your head, the other searched each crevice of your baby's fullness for specks of grime, lint, excretion, encrusted milk. She cleansed each ear as if it were a carving she were polishing, and when she drew you out of the tub and dried your flushed skin, you were a prince curried for court, a groom about to marry, perhaps—I say this gently, Grandfather, but without apology—a corpse prepared for the formal descent into the earth's folds.

It had rained, I imagine, during the night and now the August sun was burning the moisture off the trees and grass and off the cobblestones and tin roofs, the vapor hissing like a secret the morning was telling to anyone who knew how to listen. You knew how to listen. With your infant's wisdom, you turned your full attention to the morning's iterations, your head lifting off your mother's shoulder to hear better the messages sailing on the air. Sssssss. Sssssss. Sssssss. All the way to the cemetery you concentrated on the sound of the water returning to the sky, climbing up the invisible cords that link forever heaven and earth. *Life*, the vapor whispered. *Life. Life.*

Simca, of course, heard other voices. Now that she believed Isaac's resolve to leave Volkovisk for good, now that the crates were packed, and the trunk full and the garden plucked of its harvest and given to the neighbors they would leave behind and for whom Simca felt sudden stabs of devotion, although she had never had much to do with them at all, now that she knew her final good-bye to the spirits was inevitable, she regained completely her fluency in their tongue, and she no longer had to be in the cemetery to hear them speak, she heard them even in

her sleep, they surrounded her with their ceaseless dirge. Sometimes Isaac would talk to her for fifteen minutes before he realized she had not heard a word. Who could compete with the swelled chorus of the ghosts?

Now, while she carried you from tomb to tomb, resting longest at the headstone of the father whose death-cries still ruptured her dreams, Isaac's own last curses exploded like musket-fire inside his pillaged shop. The soldiers dragged him to the well. Two others carried Lev Kolsky, his unconscious body sagging between them like a sack of grain. From a tree in view of the rabbi's smoldering house, twin nooses swung in the blackened air. A huddle of neighbors, forced to the site, wept. Volkovisk collapsed around them, all splinter and ash. The glazier wailed the *kaddish*, each ancient syllable a broken-winged bird struggling toward sky.

"Do the collaborators have anything to say for themselves?"

In the blur of smoke and pain, Isaac could not make out the face of the man who had spoken to him. No matter: the uniform's buttons were burning coals, the sword a lick of white flame. "Long live the Revolution!" Isaac screamed, the words ripping like fire through his scorched throat.

And then the bench on which his bound feet rested was kicked away.

And all that remained of the future was one last intake of breath.

And Isaac Lieb entered forever the perfect democracy of the dead.

When Simca saw the smoke drifting up the hill, when she heard her father's *Aiiii, aiiii, aiiii* rising to the cemetery in an endless echo of her childhood nightmare, she jumped with you, Grandfather, into a newly-dug grave, covered you both with earth she clawed away from the grave's sides, and when you opened your mouth to howl, she filled it with her breast which, quite suddenly, was once again engorged with milk. For an hour Simca nursed you in the grave she feared the two of you might never leave. With a finger, she made holes in the dirt that concealed you both, little tunnels to air and light. Gradually, the cries from the town diminished, and then it was so quiet Simca could hear the worms burrowing through the earth in which she hid. You slept against her skin as she struggled to keep herself awake; her finger moved more and more slowly through the warm soil. Would it be so bad, she wondered, to go to sleep forever among the spirits she loved, close again to her father, her baby fused again to her body as if he had never been born at all?

You had not been to the graves with your mother since those days in which the still water in which you floated heaved and eddied and you taught yourself to survive in that turbulence by willing your pulse motionless, by instructing the currents of your blood to slow, by rendering your furled body hard as a snail's shell, jointless, impervious to the swirling pool in which she bore you to the burial grounds. Even as the waters of her womb crashed about you, you listened—with her or through her—to the songs of the dead, those dolphin voices traveling to you through the rough sea in which you survived.

*Be calm*, you wanted to tell your mother before you had words. Did you understand then the gift she offered that she did not know she was providing? Did you think, before you had words, *I am without illusion, Mama; I will be born with the knowledge of death; in this roiling darkness, the truth of creation shines like the moon I cannot yet see and, Mama, I hear my infant's whimper rattle in the old man's throat I keep inside this baby's neck, I feel my flesh thin to dust beneath this mask of baby's dimpled fat*. If not, I thank her for you, now, your granddaughter says: *Simca, how strong a swimmer he became!*

"Simca! Simca Lieb! Simca, do you he-e-e-e-ar me!"

It was Ilka Blum, calling from the graveyard. *I am here*, Simca answered, but as on that morning in the shed sixteen years ago, Simca's voice lay entombed within her. *I am here, I am here!* but she was silent as a corpse. Ilka might have given up, trudged back to the wreckage of the town, had not you awakened that moment from your dark sleep, Grandfather, had not your cry surfaced like a bright fish swimming for its life. Ilka sank her hands into the depths from which you called. Her hands clasping your head, Simca using all her strength to push you up, you rose, you rose through the narrow channel, a child of history born a second time into the shining ruins of the world.

3

By the time Ilka managed to help the weakened Simca out of the grave, the true dead had been gathered, laid out in a long row in front of the synagogue where Isaac and Lev had been hanged. Blankets had been found to cover each corpse, but their feet remained visible, as if the living needed proof that these were the bodies of friends and relations, not bundles of firewood or sacks of flour assembled for display.

Already a group of men were building coffins, each hammer strike a victim's name. As Simca and Ilka and the baby Nathan descended the smoke-shrouded hill to the town, a half-dozen men with shovels slung over their shoulders mounted the path to the cemetery.

What happened to Simca when she lifted the cloth from Isaac's face and saw his contorted features, his gray skin, the blood from a head-wound clotted into a scarlet skullcap?

In this legend I am inventing, her heart splits open like a down-filled pillow. A sudden storm of feathers clogs her veins, fills her lungs, a last breath flutters from her lips and she falls across Isaac as if in final embrace.

I want them to be buried together.

I want to travel to Lithuania and find the single stone that marks their common bed.

If history insists on brutality, I will insist on romance.

If history risks the macabre, I will risk the sentimental.

Grandfather, you told me, "No matter what happens in the world, the birds keep singing."

I am a bird perched on the granite slab that never existed, a sparrow in the Volkovisk cemetery bulldozed by the Nazis nearly forty years ago. On that land there is a playground now, or perhaps an apartment building, maybe a small plant that manufactures something as innocent as shoes.

No matter.

*I keep singing, Grandfather, I keep singing.*