

GILDA HABER

### *The Cable Street Battle*

Sunday I walked the mile through the sooty slums of London's 1936 Jewish East End to pay homage to the matriarch, my grandmother, Booba. Mummy had dressed me in my autumn red hat and coat. In spite of that, a little shiver ran through my body. Suppose the Wolf was hiding behind the forest of old East End buildings. Suppose the Fascist girl jumped out, banged me hard over the head with a plank again, giving me a headache and shouted, "Jewgirl!" Then there were my two young uncles, who worked in Booba's grocery shop. What new mischief had they prepared for me? On my last visit, Uncle Max had laughed and said, "Come and sit on my lap and watch smoke come out of my ears." Trustingly, I had climbed on his lap, stared hard at his ears, and nearly choked as he blew cigarette smoke into my face. Uncle Sam, when I was bored, told me to count the rice in the huge sack. When I saw that one hundred grains did not even fill my small palm, and looked at the enormous sack, I saw him laugh at me.

Finally, I had to face my grandmother, Booba, she who could melt wallpaper with her acid tongue, and who studied me from head to foot to see everything on me was perfect. After this inspection, she always bent down over the marble grocery shop counter, and offered me her cool cheek to kiss. For kindness, I would need to find my grandfather, Zada, who would sweep me into his strong arms—he'd been in the Czar's Cavalry—and whisper, "*Bubbele, zeeselle, fleegelle,*" little doll, little sweet one, little wing, hugging and kissing me, his stubble scratching my cheek. Zada would be across the cobbled backyard in the granary, singing Yiddish songs, while weighing rice, beans and barley into one-pound brown paper bags.

A girl of seven, small, but wiry, like my deaf daddy, I walked the mile safely this time. "You only weighed five pounds when you were born," Mummy told me. "I never wanted to marry, Booba insisted, nor have a child, especially in the Depression. Daddy wanted a boy." My fault I was born, I thought. My fault I was not a boy.

As I entered the spotless shop, glittering under electric lights, Booba stood in her white coat at the counter, a long serrated knife

in her hand, staring at the white scale with two pans hanging on either side: queen of judgment over the half-side Scotch salmon glistening coral on the white and green marble counter. She finished slicing slivers of Scotch salmon so thin as to be almost transparent, passed two slices shivering on the knife onto tissue into the white scale's right pan. In the left pan, she dropped tiny iron weights I wished I could play with, *click click click* as they hit the metal, making both pans teeter up and down and the black needle of the weighing machine shoot frantically right and left until it settled on the weight. Booba looked sternly at the scale needle measuring the salmon as if weighing its guilt. Only then did she notice me, standing small, my head just above the marble counter.

"So nu? *Machst a leben?*" Are you earning a living?

Always tongue-tied with Booba, I smiled, shyly and looked at my Shirley Temple shoes.

As usual, Booba wore smart clothes under her unbuttoned white grocer's coat, showing through the coat full breasts and a small waist. Her severe gold and green Tartar eyes pierced mine; her hair, as always, marched in orderly marcelled waves which Mummy weekly set.

Daddy told me Booba had stolen her sister's fiancé, their cousin, Benzion, made her sister pay for the wedding, and ran away with the groom the next day on the first train from Minsk to London. Was there such a train?

My two young uncles in their white grocers' coats stood on either side of my grandmother. Uncle Sam, eighteen, was handsome, short, sickly with rheumatism. Uncle Max at sixteen stood six feet tall, strong and slim, with shiny, dark, Brylcreemed hair and a dimple in his chin like Cary Grant in American films.

Booba said to my uncles, "I'm going inside. Watch the shop."

As soon as she left through the frosted glass door connecting the shop to the dining room, disappearing into another world like the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, Uncle Max began striding up and down behind the marble counter, waving his hands at Uncle Sam.

"I can't stand here doing nothing. I've got to go. Didn't you see on the newsreel last night, Hitler's thugs in Berlin cutting off Jews' beards, making them lick the ground, beating them and laughing? Mosley, Hitler's arse licker, is trying to do the same, here. You heard on the wireless, the government gave the bloody Fascist Blackshirts

permission to march through the East End of London today. You can bet these hooligans will smash our shops and beat up Jews, like the Nazis. My pals decided it's our duty to stop them. We're all going. I'm leaving now. *You* look after the shop."

"Mama won't like you going," Uncle Sam whispered, glancing fearfully through the open door at Booba in the dining room, knowing Booba's sharp tongue.

Booba stood in the dining room behind the shop, arranging her favorite gladioli, which, like her, stood imperious and cold. The crystal vase's reflection shimmered in the polished dining room table.

"What shall I tell Mama?" Uncle Sam asked.

"Say I took Martha for a walk," Uncle Max hissed, tearing off his white coat, snatching my hand, and hurrying me out of the shop.

"Wait," Uncle Sam called out, running after us, but Uncle Max and I were already on Cambridge Heath Road, walking fast—where to, I had no idea. I was thrilled that Uncle Max was taking me out. Usually he teased me. He'd never taken me for a walk before.

So I didn't ask where we were going. I had to run fast to keep up with his long legs. I was small for seven, but sturdy, and the best skipper in my class. I felt very daring to be doing something Booba would have surely forbidden. As I caught sight of my reflection in a shop window, I was glad I was wearing my red hat and coat because the October day was chilly, and Mummy had told me that Jewish people wore red for protection. My face in the windows appeared as usual, pale, my dark hair like that of most little girls, short and shingled, and I had the same Tartar shape eyes as Booba, Mummy, and Aunt Mitzi. I didn't care that some children in school trailed me in single file, chanting, "Chinky Chinky China." I liked having different eyes.

Uncle Max hurried along holding my hand. Suddenly, dozens of other young men tumbled out of four slum side streets where old houses stood, damp glistening on the soot-blackened bricks. They came rushing out, their feet hitting East End cobblestones left by the ancient Romans, and all of them merged into one mass going in the same direction.

"Where's everyone going?" I asked.

"Cable Street," Uncle Max said between clenched teeth, for once not teasing me.

A shout rose from all the men's mouths, getting louder as they joined another crowd, chanting, "They shall not pass, they shall not pass."

"Who shall not pass?" I asked Uncle Max.

"The bloody Mosley Fascists," said Uncle Max, sometimes stopping with other young men to rip white posters showing Mosley's sneering, upper-class, mustached white face and spidery swastikas off walls and lamp-posts. I was used to seeing swastikas smeared in black on the school brick walls opposite our house. The posters said something about a Fascist march on October 4, 1936. Oh, was that today?

Cars, rarely seen in the East End, drove slowly down the street, loudspeakers on top blaring, "Keep out Mosley. Keep out the Blackshirts."

Other men in groups poured out of all the grubby little side streets carrying signs on sticks and banners saying, "ILF: International Labour Party" and "Young Socialists." I was surprised that they dressed as well as Daddy. Some wore suits or hand-knitted pullovers under their jackets against the crisp October day; others wore white shirts and ties; many sported bowlers, trilbies, or caps. I'd never seen so many men in one place; all carried banners saying Union, Labour, Communist, Socialist. The unionists were brawny union dockers, but the others were ordinary men from the Labour Party, Communists, Socialists, skinny sweatshop Jews, some bearded with yarmulkes or hats, some clean-shaven with or without hats or caps. All surged forward like one giant man.

"So many men coming from every street," I said. "Is the King coming again?"

"I told you. We're going to stop the Fascist march," said Uncle Max, his lips still pressed together, his dimpled chin sticking out. It was hard to keep up with this Daddy-Long-Legs so I held tightly on to his big sixteen-year-old hand.

Other young men who went to tea dances with Uncle Max, running the same way, said, "Wotcha Max," their faces grim. He just nodded to them.

As we ran I saw the words "They Shall Not Pass" whitewashed large, on the walls, lampposts and pavements. Black words painted on white sheets hung out of windows, just the way they had when King George V passed through the East End in his gold coach for

the Jubilee, only the signs then read, "God Save the King." Now the sheets all said, "THEY SHALL NOT PASS."

"Look, a trolley's stuck at Gardner's Corner," I said, pointing (forbidden, but I was so excited) to a bright red double-decker Number 65 tram for Blackwall Tunnel. People inside the trolley stood packed together downstairs, all up the winding stairs leading to the upper deck where I loved to ride, and on the upper deck, so many people were jammed together they couldn't budge. White faces and noses from inside pressed against the tram glass. Limp hands hung out of the windows like monkeys' from a cage, except these hands were white and not hairy. Men's bodies outside the red double-decker pressed against it on all sides so that no one inside could get out. A low rumble became louder and louder as we ran. Then the noise grew into a roar, and when we finally turned the corner into Cable Street, my mouth dropped open in astonishment. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men pressed so tightly together they could hardly move.

On one end of Cable Street fierce booted Blackshirts stood shoulder to shoulder, and at the other, Jewish end facing them, banners flying, stood unionists, Socialists, Communists, Jews united, roaring, "They shall not pass, they shall not pass." I was trembling with excitement and the fear that I would lose Uncle Max. Then what would I do? There were no women or children. I was the only child in the crowd. A huge man in front of me crushed my foot with his.

"Oh, my foot!" I cried, hopping in pain.

"Up you go," said Uncle Max, hoisting me onto his shoulders. I had a wonderful view of everything from up there. I felt as tall as a man on stilts.

A cordon held back the "They Shall Not Pass" men: our side. I bent down and caught a glimpse of Uncle Max's mouth wide open shouting, "They shall not pass." We were still behind the cordon, and in front of it, a long line of blue uniformed police sat straight and grim-faced on prancing horses. All the white horses looked as if they, too, wore uniforms. The police pulled on their horses' reins while trying to keep the surging crowds at their backs, behind them. The animals' heads jerked, perhaps from the bit; their eyes rolled wildly showing the whites. I felt sorry for the horses. At the other end of Cable Street, the Blackshirts waited for their leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, to begin their march, faces sour and angry. Where

was he? I wanted to see this ogre, but was afraid to see the hatred, which in Daddy's morning newspaper burned so fiercely in his black eyes.

"He's late," muttered Uncle Max, pushing against the cordon, touching a horse.

"Get back," the police shouted. Uncle Max pulled on me, looking around for his friends.

"Why are the police keeping us back?" I asked.

"They want a clear space for the damned Blackshirts to march. The Fascists are waiting for Mosley to come and lead them. He's probably chatting with his Nazi friends Goebbels and Hitler and his Nazi girlfriend. Doesn't care about his wife."

I had heard Mummy's customers in the shop gossiping about married men who ran around with other women, so I wasn't that surprised.

My uncle and his friends' crowd, growing bigger every minute, booed the Blackshirts, who stuck out their white, black-sleeved hands, pale white fingers pointed in the air, and shouted hoarsely, "Heil Hitler," then sang a rowdy song and stamped their heavy leather boots. I couldn't understand the words. "What are they singing?" I shouted.

"That's the Horst Wessel song," Uncle Max shouted over the noise, "one of the 'Master Race's' disgusting songs about the joy of seeing Jewish blood spurting from the knife."

I didn't know who Hitler was or what was a master race, but the words "Jewish blood spurting" frightened me and reminded me of the time I cut myself and red blood poured out and wouldn't stop, and I imagined I'd be empty. The noise of the chant "they shall not pass" began to drown out the Blackshirts' singing. I wanted to put my hands over my ears but couldn't because I was holding on to Uncle Max's head and would fall into the angry crowd.

The police from their high seats on their horses suddenly began swinging truncheons and hitting the men on our side over their heads. They howled; every now and then a man fell down, bleeding, but the crowd picked him up and went on chanting, "They shall not pass, they shall not pass."

"We have to break the police line," Uncle Max shouted to his friends, now gathered.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men shoved and pushed against the police cordon and the prancing horses.

“The police are bloody Fascists, too,” I remembered Mummy saying. “No use calling them when the Blackshirts smash our shop windows.”

I’d always thought the blond Bobbies on the corner of each street were kind. They helped children and old ladies cross the street, but these Bobbies stared at us behind the line with hatred.

What had we done wrong?

I wrapped both arms tighter around Uncle Max’s head.

“You’re covering my eyes, I can’t see,” he said sharply.

Suddenly I heard the crash and tinkle of breaking glass, the way I heard it when the Fascists just last week threw a brick through our shop window.

Three men ran out of a building carrying a young woman screaming, “Oh my Gawd! Oh my Gawd!” the way cockneys said, “God,” blood pouring down her face and legs, sharp pieces of glinting glass sticking out of her bloody back.

Horrified, I burst into tears.

Uncle Max lifted me off of his shoulders and held me gently against his chest, like Zada. I curled my arms around his neck and buried my face in it.

“I want to go home,” I sobbed.

“Sha, sha, it’s all right,” he said. “That’s where I should have left you. I’m an idiot. I didn’t know there would be such a mob. Look, there’s Toby Frost’s flat. It’s lucky she lives on Cable Street. I’m going to take you up to her flat and you stay there until I come back for you, all right?”

He hoisted me back onto his shoulders and because he was so tall and strong, shoved his way through the chanting, jostling crowds until we came to Toby’s downstairs door. The Frost family lived over Gronofsky’s tailor shop on the second floor. The sign over Gronofsky’s hanging by a chain swinging in the wind read:

S. Gronofsky & M. Lightning

Suits made to Measure

Misfits a Specialty

We had lots of misfits in the East End; bandy legs, pigeon breasts, goiters. Toby Frost's brother, Harry, had a huge hump.

The Frost's downstairs front door was as always open. Uncle Max put me down, and we rushed up the old, shaky wooden stairs two at a time to the Frost's flat. He burst through Mrs. Frost's glass-paned kitchen door.

"Look who's here..." Mrs. Frost began. "What a noise down there?" Then seeing me small and shivering behind him she said, "Are you *meshuggah*? You're crazy to bring the child!"

"Here, look after her, I'll be back," Uncle Max said, and clattered down the narrow winding stairs back to the crowds. I stood at the top of the stairs watching his back disappear. Mrs. Frost flung up the window from the bottom. The crowds roaring below sounded like a terrible sea storm. I put my hands over my ears.

"A *meshugene*, a madman, bringing a child into this!" Mrs. Frost called out to his back, but he wouldn't hear because of the shouting. She closed the window, the sound became faint, came back to me and stroked my hair. "There, there, *kinderle*. Don't cry, child."

Mrs. Frost's daughter, Toby, was Mummy's friend. Toby told us her mother had married an older man who had died, and that she was now a poor widow. Toby worked as a seamstress in a sweatshop and supported her mother and her brother, Harry. I liked Mrs. Frost's brown soft eyes and long, dark hair, which, gathered in a soft knot at the nape of her neck, looked like a hank of silk.

She dried my eyes with a white handkerchief. "He's only a child himself, sixteen, but he ought to know better. Come, *kinderle*," she said to me, "sit, and I'll make you a nice cup of tea."

Harry came into the kitchen. "Mum, turn on the wireless. I want to hear the news." Harry's humpback was the largest I had ever seen. He never went out because the children tormented him so, but all day he sat at his bedroom window, watched the street or read the newspaper and books, or went into the kitchen and listened to the wireless. The BBC announcer was saying, "...three thousand of Sir Oswald Mosley's Fascist followers have gathered, here in Royal Mint Street in their uniform black shirts and boots, just like Hitler's followers, to march through the East End of London. They have been impatiently awaiting the arrival of their leader. Sir Oswald was supposed to have arrived at 1:30 p.m. but he is two hours late. Fights have broken out between the BUF, The British



Union of Fascists, and anti-Fascists here in Royal Mint Street with both sides throwing bricks, bottles and stones. All available police in the London metropolis are on active duty. Police reporters, an autogyro and aeroplane surveillance say that over 100,000 people and 7,000 police have gathered in Cable Street through which the BUF obtained police permission to march today.”

“Marvelous,” Harry said. “This will make history! I’m going back to my bedroom to watch out the window what happens. I hope we kill that *mamser*, Mosley.”

I knew that *mamser* was Yiddish for a bastard, but I wasn’t sure what a bastard was. Someone really bad?

Mrs. Frost sat me at the kitchen table. In the East End, a black kettle always purred over a blue and orange flame on the gas stove, for visitors. No one had a telephone, and people just knocked on the door and walked in, day or night.

Mrs. Frost boiled milk on the gas stove, picked the skin off the top, poured hot milk into the white cup, and then poured boiling water through a tea strainer. She dropped in two lumps of sugar and stirred it for me, the spoon clinking against the inside of the cup. I shivered from excitement and fright. All those thousands of men, looking so angry; the police who I thought were my friends, hitting Jewish and union men on the head, the enormous white horses with their long, beautiful swishing tails. It was exciting and confusing. However, after a sip of strong, sweet tea, I felt better, then dashed over to the kitchen windows to look for Uncle Max. Would the police hit him on the head? Would he fall? How would I get home?

The crowds below were, in places, so thick no one could move except to sway back and forth. Looking out the kitchen window, I could see Harry’s head hanging out of his bedroom window. His hump, almost higher than his head, towered over his poor twisted body. For sure, Gronovsky made his suits. Mummy said that Harry had a hump because when Mrs. Frost was pregnant she fell down the stairs. I ran to Harry though I was a little afraid of him. He looked the way I imagined the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* looked. But when I dared look into his brown eyes, they seemed, like the Beast’s, intelligent and kindly.

“Can you see my uncle? What’s happening, Harry?” I asked.

"A wonderful thing is happening," he said, his brown eyes shining. "Mosley's Blackshirts are trying to march through the East End to beat Jews and smash our shops and thousands of our boys are fighting to stop him. If only I could fight myself."

"Aren't the police going to stop Mosley?"

"Stop them?" Harry laughed, "Come here. Look out of my window. Do you see the police stopping them? They're *helping* them, trying to clear a way for them. In Leeds the Fascists called a rally, the Jews came out in protest, and the Blackshirts hit a Jewish bloke so hard they blinded him. Guess who they arrested? Jews. The British police and most of the *goyim* sympathize with the Fascists. Don't you see the signs on all the walls on your way to school, "JP." It means 'Jews should Perish.'"

I did see the signs and the swastikas, but I didn't know what JP meant and didn't like to ask: What does perish mean? What does a swastika mean? I knew it was something bad against Jews, and the black, spidery swastika made my heart miss a beat, but I didn't know exactly why.

Searching the crowds from the Frost's second story window, I couldn't see Uncle Max anywhere. I would never find him in the thousands of men below who, jammed together were still chanting, "They shall not pass."

I heard a crack as a stick hit a man's head. He fell, but his mates picked him up and surged forward angrily against the police, pushing against their horses. The horses pranced, their sharp hooves clicking on the road as the police tried to hold our side behind the cordon. Dozens of other police on foot stood further back behind the anti-Fascists in case, I supposed, my uncle and his friends broke out from the back of the crowd. There seemed to be almost as many police as Fascists and anti-Fascists, except the police wore blue shirts, and the Fascists, black.

"Look at that. Everyone came out together. Mosley's against unions, so all the union dockers came out. He's Fascist, so the Socialists and Communists came. He's anti-Semitic, so the Jews came. For once they're all united instead of fighting each other. Look. Look over there," Harry shouted. He leaned out the window. A roar went up from the crowd below, and all the men below turned to look where Harry's long finger pointed.

“Look! Our boys have broken through the police cordon. They’re trying to turn over a lorry on Cable Street to make a barricade so the Blackshirts can’t march through our Jewish section!” Harry shouted, pointing to a crowd of men pushing the side of an enormous lorry. Strong Irish dockers, labourers, muscles bulging, Jews in beards, men in derbies shoulder to shoulder, all pushing together, strained to overturn the huge lorry. It rocked back and forth, back and forth, until finally the men all put their shoulders to one side of it and one shouted, “One, two, three, heave,” and the lorry crashed over on its side with a thud, wood splinters flying, glass windows shattering, and a great cloud of dust went up all round it so that the men who pushed it over jumped back so as not to be hit by the flying glass and splinters. Everyone on our side roared with delight.

Then our men, behind the overturned lorry lying on its side like an elephant, threw piles of corrugated iron, chunks of old beer barrels left by the cooper-smiths, planks of wood and glass bottles over the hulk. The dockers with their giant hooks ripped up pavements, smashed them into pieces and threw a hail of stones over the barricade at the mounted police. The police horses reared up, neighing.

“Why are they throwing stones?” I asked Harry.

“I told you already. To keep Fascists and the police from getting through Cable Street to the Jewish East End,” he shouted, eyes blinking fast. Did I imagine it or did his hump quiver?

I suddenly saw Uncle Max behind the barricade on our side throwing a hail of shiny little black balls over it.

“Ball bearings,” Harry muttered with satisfaction.

The police charged up to the overturned truck and the men in front of it, but just before the horses reached them, their hooves slid on the metal ball bearings and they fell squirming, neighing, screaming, upside-down, black hooves waving in the air. Policemen went flying in all directions. One policeman fell, his horse on top of him. His bobby’s hat fell off as he lay there, blond, helmet on the ground. Clutching his stomach, he moaned, “Oooh, oooh.”

I felt sorry for the horse, I wasn’t sure about the policeman. Was he a friend or not?

“Ha, ha,” laughed the men on our side of the barricade. “Bloody Fascist bobby.”

After six or seven tries to ride their horses forward toward the lorry, the police finally turned back, scowling. The crowds cheered.

They began again roaring, "They shall not pass," over and over and over again.

"They had police permission to march but we're going to stop them." Harry crowed joyously. "Oh, I wouldn't have missed this for anything."

The roaring from the street was so deafening even my deaf daddy would have heard it. I wondered what Mummy would have said. She thought I was with Booba all this time so she wouldn't be worried. She'd never dream I was with the Frosts on Cable Street in the middle of a big fight. I was so excited, I bit my nails down to the cuticle. Mummy would be cross with me.

"Come away from the window and finish your tea," Mrs. Frost said to Harry and me. "I'm worried about Toby; I hope she isn't caught in this crowd. It's no place for a woman."

"Don't worry, Mum, she said she was going to see her friend Sadie in Epping. That's miles away," Harry said.

"*Gotzedunk*, thank God," said Mrs. Frost, wiping her hands on the white apron she always wore, as she finally came to the window with us, to look. She was just in time to see a burly policeman smartly smack a young Jewish man with his stick. The man fell down, covering his face so the policeman couldn't hit his eyes. Blood spurted from his head.

"*Oy a broch!* A curse on them!" Mrs. Frost cried, and, running for empty milk bottles, came back and rained six of them down on the policeman's head, hitting him with each one. The policeman looked up and shook his stick at her. She stuck a long, pink tongue out at him, and her bun came undone, her silky hair tumbled below her waist. She looked like a girl. Who would believe that the quiet Mrs. Frost would be so cheeky? A real cockney, full of spunk.

Noticing movement in other houses on our floor level, I saw more women in white pinafores framed in their open windows throwing bricks, bottles, and water on the tall hats of the policemen and screaming at them words which only women coming out of the pub used. Instead of being as usual, quiet Jewish women, they were being bold and brave fighters. The police, Jewish women, everyone and everything had changed. I was in a different country, and totally confused. I just knew that together with his friends, Uncle Max and all our side had stopped Mosley marching through the Jewish East

End. I felt so proud of him, and all those brave men below. I was not used to feeling proud.

A loud buzzing overhead made us look up at the sky. Some strange things, not blimps, were flying overhead, besides a small aeroplane.

“Autogyros,” Harry said, “counting the people, probably. Ha ha,” he crowed, “with that lorry blocking their route the lousy Blackshirts will never be able to get to us. Turn up the wireless again, Mother—let’s hear what they have to say.”

“The crowd is...wait, a bulletin has just come in from the Metropolitan Commissioner of Police, Sir Phillip Game. Sir Phillip says that owing to the violence already evident between the BUF and their opponents, the Commissioner has decided that this march would be impossible without serious riots and bloodshed. It cannot, therefore, take place. The Commissioner has sent a police escort to lead the BUF procession in the opposite direction, along the Embankment, to Temple Underground Station. However, outbreaks of violence between Fascists and the Young Communist League are reported in Trafalgar Square. The Young Communist League had its own meeting there today protesting the rule of Generalissimo Franco and in support of the Spanish Republic.”

“Christ, the whole world is turning Fascist.” Harry said. “But thank God we stopped this march.”

Somehow the news had reached the 100,000 protesters gathered below, and a great roar went up as they cheered their victory and threw their hats and caps into the air. Harry caught a bowler as it came sailing past our window and stuck it on his big head. With the hat and his hump, he looked stranger than ever. The men below started dancing arm in arm in the streets, singing, “Knees Up Mother Brown,” the pub song gentiles sang and danced to in the streets when the pubs closed on Saturday nights. Harry turned up the sound on the wireless.

“So far, there have been eighty-four arrests, and eighty people, including fifteen police, have been injured in the crowds.”

“You can guess who they’re arresting,” Harry said. “Jews first, then Communists, then dockers. Those bloody Fascists can forget about getting drunk tonight at the Salmon and Ball.”

“Is that a pub?”

“Yes. It’s their favorite meeting place near Trafalgar Square where the Fascists rally and pump each other up,” Harry said. “They’ll be crying in their beer tonight.”

Uncle Max, a red cut on his left cheek, finally came leaping up the stairs. We walked home along with thousands of men, some bloody, but victorious against Mosley’s Fascists. Women poured out of houses to greet their heroes. Men and women danced in the street. This time, as they laughed together, I skipped in front of Uncle Max and his friends on the way back to Booba’s house.

Mummy had become worried when I didn’t return on time, and had walked to Booba’s to find out what happened to me. As Uncle Max and I walked in, Booba ranted and raged at him for going, and Mummy shouted at him for taking me, but both were too relieved we were safe and about the outcome of the battle to be seriously angry. After all, except for that cut on Uncle Max’s cheek, neither of us had been hurt. Still, it had been exciting to share the Cable Street adventure with my young uncle.

The next day, on the wireless at breakfast, the Fascists claimed it was all outside Communists who came and fought them, but Mummy said hotly, “Bloody liars.”

“Still,” Mummy said, “Hitler has many supporters in England and Germany and in Italy under Mussolini. Even the Mufti Arabs are on his side. We’re in for trouble.”

My cousin Zalman, a Polish Jewish refugee from Hitler, had already arrived in England.

The Nazis had killed his wife and child. I’d never seen a man cry.

For the first time, I saw Booba give someone tea, strudel, and some kind words.

The next day, Uncle Max came to our house. He sometimes helped Daddy in our barbershop. After closing the shop, we sat in the kitchen, drinking tea before the roaring fire.

“The BUF is forbidden to march in their black shirts and leather boots now, and Mosley might be imprisoned in the Tower of London,” Uncle Max shouted, so my nearly deaf daddy could hear.

“That evening after we beat the Fascists, we all danced in the streets and shouted, ‘Down with Mosley, down with the BUF,’” Uncle Max crowed. “After the Fascists’ humiliation at Cable Street, we Jews who rarely go into pubs joined the gentile dockers, union-

ists, Socialists and Communists with a beer in celebrating the victory for democracy." I wondered what that was.

"Too bad everyone doesn't come out against the Nazis in Germany as we did here with the Fascists," Daddy said.

"The Nazis would have shot all the anti-Fascists," Mummy said. "It's bad enough our police side with the Fascists. If they carried guns, like the Nazis, they would have shot us."

"Well it's not the end of the Fascists nor of the Nazis," Uncle Max said. "The Fascists and Nazis are getting stronger all over Europe. It's not the end, it's just the beginning."

My uncle's face had changed from a laughing, teasing boy's face to that of a serious man. His was now the stern face of a soldier.