

C H A P T E R 32
A SAVIOR FOR LISA AND FRANCIS.

We had moved at about the end of 1940 from the Malecon to a small garden apartment in Ampliacion de Almendares, a suburb of Havana, where we shared the apartment with a Viennese pharmacist, Mr. Glussmann, his wife, and little daughter Elfi, who was of about the same age as Johanna. The apartment consisted of four rooms and a little kitchen, quite primitive, but we liked it, especially on account of the garden, where there were banana trees and great many flowers, and especially beautiful poinsettias, very tall ones. The children played nicely together, also with little Hortensia, the daughter of our landlords Martinez. The family Glussmann got soon the immigrations visas for the United States, and we had then the whole apartment all to ourselves. We often went to the nearby beach from there, had to ride there a short distance by bus. I was getting busy at that time, had developed a medical practice, and had to make house calls, earning some money. I had to make the calls by bus, of course.

Then, one evening, a miracle happened. The telephone rang

and a man, whose name I have forgotten and whom I had not known before, said that he would like to bring a patient over, who is in severe pain. It was a good friend of his, a Cuban, an officer of the immigration department. I was frightened and told him that I had no license to practice medicine in Cuba, and that I did not want him to bring that man to me. Then that man started to talk to me. He said that he was in severe pain and that I should help him, that he was suffering for 8 years from trigeminal neuralgia and that no doctor could help him, that he was an officer of the immigration department and that I should therefore not be afraid to see him, also that he did not ask me to treat him, but that he only wanted to talk to me. I finally gave in, and the two men arrived within about half an hour. His name was Agramonte, a tall good-looking man. I had to give him a pain-relieving tablet, before he could talk to me. I told him that he probably knew that trigeminal neuralgia was an incurable disease, and that only an injection of alcohol into a ganglion on the base of the brain could help. He knew about it, and he was once already determined to have it done, but that he would have had to sign a document that he knew of the danger that the injection could cause blindness of one or perhaps both eyes, and that he therefore did not want the injection, that he had seen many important physicians, professors of the University, and that none of them knew anything else to recommend than the injection. He told me that he has had the condition for 8 years, with almost daily attacks, which lasted for hours, and that only strong drugs could calm his pains, morphine or big doses of codeine or similar drugs. The pains started on the right side below the eye, irradiated from

there to the right side of the nose and upper lip, caused redness and sweating of the right side of the face and tearing of the right eye. He also said that he will probably commit suicide, if this goes on much longer. I asked him now about his teeth, whereupon he pulled out of his mouth a denture, comprising all upper teeth of the right side. On further questioning he explained that he had to have the teeth extracted, as some doctors said that the pain may be caused by a bad tooth and that in the course of 8 years he had to have all the upper teeth on the right side extracted. My next idea was that a part of the root of a tooth may have remained in the jaw, and I asked him about X-rays. He then pulled out of his pocket a number of X-ray films, which I examined carefully. They did not seem to show any part of a root, nor any other abnormality. I then told him that X-rays don't always tell the truth, that they even sometimes lie. He was astonished to hear that. Next I asked him whether he has had any relief after one of the many tooth extractions. He told me "Yes, after the first extraction" and that that was a very bad tooth, and that there was secretion of pus out of the wound for about 6 months, till the opening finally closed up, and that some time afterwards the same pain had started again, and that there was no relief after the extraction of the other teeth.

I did not have to ask any other question, as I knew now the correct diagnosis. I now put my left hand to the back of his head and with the index finger of my right hand I pressed hard against the area next to the nostril on the right side, causing him a severe pain. On further more gentle examination I could then feel a slight swelling in that area, very sensi-

tive to slight pressure. I asked him whether he had a good dentist and he said that he had a very good one, who was a professor and teaching dentistry at the University. I told him that he should go to him and tell him that he was told that he had a deposit from an old abscess in the bone in the area, where the tip of the root of the right second incisor tooth once was, which was pressing against the nerve, and that he needed a little operation to clean out that area. I showed him by pulling up my lip, where the incision should be done, that that was the ~~the~~ nearest spot to reach that area. He understood and both men left. He did not tell me that he will come back. After about 10 days he called up and came back, this time without the other man. He told me that the dentist had done that operation and that he had found some dry material there, something like sand, and that he was free of any pain for about one week, but that the pain had now started again. I asked him how ^{he} had made the operation and he said that he had drilled a hole in the bone in the same direction, in which the tooth had been pulled out, and not high up, where I had shown him. I told him that he should go back to the dentist and explain to him what I had shown him, where the operation should be done. He asked me to accompany him and explain it to the dentist. I refused to do that, told him that that would be very embarrassing for me, but he insisted and almost forced me to get into his car, and we drove to the dentist. It was very unpleasant for me, but I plaid my part, I think, very well, telling him that he was the expert and that I could not tell him anything, since I did not know much about dentistry, that I was only a general practitioner, but that there is a

possibility that there was more of that calcium deposit in the bone, and that it should be easy to reach it high up and that a strip of gauze should be put into the cavity. He spoke a lot, told me that he had done that kind of operation hundreds of times, and wanted to do it right away on that patient. But the patient wanted it postponed for the next day, since he had already eaten lunch and wanted it done when the stomach was empty. I was happy when I was again out in the street.

I did not hear anything from that man for about three weeks, when he suddenly appeared at our home and told me that I had cured him completely, that after the second operation, in which more of that sand-like material was found and cleaned out and a tampon was put in, He had waited three weeks, to be sure that the pains would not come back. Now, he said, he was sure that the sufferings were definitely over. He now asked, whether there is anything that he could do for me. I said that I thought that he could, and I told him that I had a son and sister-in-law, who are in France, and that he could perhaps, as an officer of the immigration department, be able to help me to bring them over to Cuba. "Yes!" he said, "of course he could". And I had to go with him in his car right away, and he took me to a notary public, where a document was prepared, giving the names, age, and address of Lisa and Francis, and stating that the legal presuppositions for their immigration to Cuba had been fulfilled, consisting of deposits of 500 dollars per person, also bank deposits of 2000 dollars per person, and deposits for the return trip for each person, and that they should therefore be given visas for entering Cuba. This was not exactly the wording of the document, which I don't

remember, but the meaning. With the document we drove first to the immigration department, where it was signed, perhaps by Dr. Ituarte, the immigration director, and from there we drove to the Department of State, from where a telegram was sent to the Cuban consul in Nice. Unnecessary to say, how happy I was and how happy Hedy was, when I had come home and told her the good news. We wrote, of course, immediately to Lisa, but letters took a very long time to reach their destination and we did not hear from them for many weeks. There came letters from them, but these were answers to previous letters. One day, I received a telephone call from our former landlady on the Malecon, who told me that a telegram had arrived, addressed to me. I went right away to pick it up. It was in French and what I could understand was that the visa had not arrived yet. I went again to the Department of State and showed them the telegram. It now turned out that there was a mistake, that the Cuban consul was not in Nice, but in nearby Cannes, and a new telegram was sent, this time to the correct address, and we sent at the same time a telegram to Lisa. Everything seemed to be fine and we had now reason for hope.