

CHAPTER 6

OUR STEPFATHER

One day, it was in winter and we were ice-skating, my mother introduced me to a gentleman with a mustache and beard. I saw her later almost every evening iceskating with him. He was a good skater and she also danced with him on the ice to the music. That was around the year 1908. His name was Heinrich Brunwasser, and soon he also came to our house, and it^{did} not take long and they got married. That was on December 27th, 1908. After the wedding, my mother and my stepfather had their bedroom in the small apartment where once our great-grandmother had lived, and we children stayed for the nights with our grandfather.

My stepfather was a student of jurisprudence at the University of Czernowitz, but he gave it up and entered the business of my grandfather. He was born in the year 1876, was therefore 32 years old at the time of the wedding, four years younger than my mother, who was 36. His father's name was Wilhelm. He had a big restaurant in the biggest hotel in the center of the city, the Hotel zum Schwarzen Adler (black eagle). His mother's name was Rosa. They had four children, besides my stepfather one brother Ignaz, who had changed his name to Brunert, and was married and lived with his family in Vienna, one sister Marie, who was married to a Mr. Geber and lived in Czernowitz, and another sister Regine, who was not married at that time. 1 or 2 years later, she married a Mr. Liebermann and moved to Drohobycz in Galicia. They all were very nice people and ~~there~~ soon developed a very friendly family-relationship with our family. My stepfather had entered, as I said, the business of my grandfather, but shortly afterwards my grandfather got sick. He developed a pain in his lower back, and soon also a weakness in

both legs. The doctors, whom he had consulted, told him that it was arthritis, but they probably knew what it really was. He could not attend to his business any more, and was most of the time in bed. In the bedroom, they put up a kind of steamer, where he sat inside a round canvas chamber, where steam came in from a kettle, that was outside, and he had to sweat for about an hour. I know now, though I never heard anybody say it, that he had cancer of the prostate with metastazation in the vertebral column. He became very weak. My mother had taken care of my grandmother, who was sick for years with leukemia, and here she had exactly the same hard work for a year or two with my grandfather, whom she nursed with great care. One evening, we children were called to his bedside, and one by one, we went to him and kissed his hand. He was fully conscious. The next morning, he was dead. That was on June 14, 1910. There was an enormous funeral, and hundreds of people followed his coffin to the cemetery. There were 22 "Partezettel" (printed obituary announcements) with a black edge, from different organizations, to which he had belonged, pasted on the wall of the staircase going down to the street, when the coffin was brought down. They were also pasted on different places all over town.

My grandfather's estate was divided into 4 parts. The store in the center of the city was sold. My mother kept the house in the Tuerkengasse, and my stepfather kept only the mineral water business, which he built up into a very big business. My uncle Martin Sobel, the pharmacist, became a partner of that business, and my stepfather had to pay him out a certain part of his income for a long time.

We all moved now into the apartment of my grandfather.



Heinrich Brunwasser, our mother, and little Walter



Walter, from a painting made by Else.

My stepfather managed the whole business from an office in our house, the same room where my great-grandmother had lived. He had a young lady as secretary and he had bought a typewriter, on which I also learned how to type, with 2 fingers only, and that I am still doing up to the present time. My stepfather was very nice to me right from the beginning. He was very good-natured, a kind of man who could be called "jovial". I remember that at the time shortly after they got married, he used to sing to the accompaniment of my mother at the piano a song, which started with the line: "Oh du heiss, oh du heiss, oh du heiss geliebte Maid", translated into English: "Oh you hot, oh you hot, oh you hotly loved maiden", and which ended with the line: "du heisse, heisse, heisse, heisse, heiss-geliebte Maid", in English: "you hotly, hotly, hotly, hotly, hotly loved maiden". He also liked to recite poems of a funny type, and I still have a few of them. I later found out that he also had belonged to the same amateur theatre club of which I had become a member later, and that he had participated as an actor in plays, which were performed on the stage. He was very good to my mother and tried to please her as much as he could. And that was perhaps also the reason that he was very good to me and supported me after the war, so that I could study medicine in Vienna with a sufficient amount of money. Another cause may have been that I loved very much little Walter, who was an adorable child and that I devoted much of my time to him. My stepfather, whom I always called Uncle Heinrich, was in general a quiet man. When we were sitting together at meals, he hardly said a word. That was his nature. When we had company, he took part in conversations, but never got excited about the

subjects that were discussed. But I have to say that I did not know him well, since I was a little over 11 years old, when he came into our family, and we were together then only up to the year 1914, when the First World War broke out, when we all left Czernowitz, when I was just 17 years old. I then saw him again after the war at the end of 1918, only for one year, because the next year I left for Vienna to study medicine.

Now a few words about his relatives. His father, Wilhelm Brunwasser, was also generally a very quiet and very corpulent man. He owned a big restaurant in the center of the city. He suffered from severe diabetes, and had, late in life, one leg amputated. I saw him a few times, after the war, walking with crutches. His wife Rosa was very good-natured and I know that my mother liked her very much. She was for some reason for many months in a hospital, and my mother visited her there every single day. They probably did not leave, like great many other people, during the war, stayed on during the grim time of Russian occupation. My stepfather's sister, Marie Geber, and her husband and son Hugo probably left Czernowitz and lived as refugees in Vienna. I remember to have seen Hugo once in Vienna, a good-looking young man. From Regina, another sister of my stepfather, who had married a Mr. Liebermann in Drohobycz in Galicia, I never heard again. But the brother of my stepfather, Ignaz Brunert, was well known to me, and he and his family were my patients in Vienna and became our best friends. He had married into a fine family, Hofrath Schlag. I had met the old man with his little white beard, who had one eye only or, better said, had lost one eye for some reason, only once in 1915. After the war, when I opened my

office, they became my patients and our relations became very intimate. I loved Ignaz, who was in many respects similar to my stepfather, but in contrast to him much more talkative and almost constantly inclined to humor. The old lady, Mrs. Rosa Schlag, was the center of the family, adored and respected by all the members of the family. She consulted me as a patient quite frequently. One of her children, Else, was the wife of Ignaz Brunert, a fine lady, heading a fine household. They had two children, Ernst and Edith. Ernst had left as a refugee for England, where he had married and has two children. Edith, whom I knew as a little girl, married after her emigration a boyfriend, a very nice young man, Charles Gardner, who was born in Germany. Edith, a most lovely, beautiful lady, and Charles live in Scranton in Pennsylvania, have two sons, Stephen now also married and the father of two little children, and John, a handsome young man. We are in frequent contact with them, had visited them a few times over the years in Scranton and later in Clarks Green near Scranton. About more details, and the other members of the family, Edith and/or Charles will perhaps want to write themselves more, adding to the biography.

One day, when I came home from school, on June 13th, 1910, I heard a baby cry and I was told that my mother had given birth to a boy. I was very surprised. What was most funny about it, was, that I had not noticed anything before that my mother was pregnant. So, I had a half-brother, Walter Brunwasser.