

C H A P T E R    7  
MY SISTER ELSE, AN ARTIST

At about the year 1908, shortly before my stepfather came into our family, my sister<sup>Else</sup> was taken out of school. She was then in the 4th or 5th grade of lyceum. She had shown such an enormous talent for drawing and painting that everybody, including her teachers, said that it would be a great thing, if she would get into an art school. There was no such school, at least not a good one, in Czernowitz. My mother followed everybody's advice, and got in touch with our aunt Rosa in Berlin, who was very happy to take her into her house. My sister was then almost 16 years old. Off she went to Berlin, and she was put into a fine art school. My aunt had three children. The oldest was a girl, Alice, about two years younger than my sister, and two boys, Herbert and Felix, 2 resp. 4 years younger than their sister. My sister stayed two years in Berlin. After the first year, my aunt, cousin Alice, and my sister went for a few weeks for vacation to the Baltic sea, to a very popular place, Misdroy on the island Wollin, to the North of Steettin. They had a great time there. When she came home after two years, it was astonishing, how much she had progressed in drawing and painting, as she had brought with her sketch books and a great number of drawings and paintings. Wherever she had gone in Berlin, she made sketches, especially of people in the subway. She had a firm hand and what she did, came out perfect. She had also learnt anatomy, and her drawings of persons, naked or not, were excellent, especially regarding proportion. She had also brought with her an



enormous number of books, which she had read, works of the great philosophers Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, Ernst Haeckel, Otto Weininger, Kierkegaard, etc. I remember that she also brought the memoirs of Maria Baskirtschew. She could talk about philosophy like a grown-up person and she was then only 18 years old. She was simply amazing. She also brought a big collection of postcards of famous singers and actors, whom she had seen in theatres in Berlin. I remember that great many were portraits of the opera singer Geraldine Farrar, who was extremely beautiful and whom she adored, also pictures of Saharet, who was a famous dancer from Spain, also Otero, and Cleo de Merode. These are the names I remember. The last one was, I think, a dancer and became famous as the mistress of King Leopold II. of Belgium and the cause of great scandals.

Else was very pretty.<sup>(see pict. p 10)</sup> She played on the piano beautifully, especially classical music. She used to sing to her own accompaniment, and she had a beautiful voice. She also liked to play tennis. She was away in Berlin, when my mother and my stepfather got married. I and my brother Carl were told to call our stepfather "uncle" or "uncle Heinrich", since we found it difficult to call him "Papa" or "Father". That we did. But Else did not like to do that, and for some unexplicable reason she did not like him right from the beginning and never spoke to him. This caused a very unpleasant situation. She did not greet him, when he came home. When he came home and I and Else were in the room, I said "good evening" and so did he, but she did not open her mouth. This situation did not last long anyway. At about that time, it was the year 1910, my brother Carl had difficulties in the school. He wanted to become an actor and did not want to study. Since he had a beautiful tenor voice, he wanted to become an operetta tenor. And



Else wanted to continue her art education. But she could not go to Berlin anymore. There a great change had taken place. Immediately after my grand<sup>d</sup>father had died, our aunt Rosa got a divorce from her husband Ignaz Siodmak, and moved to Vienna, and soon married a Mr. Emmerich Hartmann. She had had him as a lover for many years. She knew him already, when she was a young girl. He was then an officer in the Austrian army, a lieutenant. She would have liked to marry him then, but he was a Christian, and therefore she could not do it on account of her parents. So, she married that man, Ignaz Siodmak and moved to Berlin. My aunt had met her lover often. Either he came to Berlin or she came to Vienna.

Mr. Hartmann was a wonderful man, tall and handsome, and a man of great knowledge. He was studying all the time, while in the army. He could speak and write 20 languages. On account of that, as a captain, he got a position in the State Department in Vienna, where he had to translate important documents from foreign countries, telegrams, newspaper articles, etc. But there was something very wrong with him. As a young officer he had contracted syphilis. He was treated then with Salvarsan or Neo-Salvarsan, which Paul Ehrlich had invented a few years earlier. It was a great medicine, and great many people were cured with it. But some not, especially when the treatment was not started right in the beginning. In the case of Mr. Hartmann it was either too late or the dosis was insufficient. Shortly after my aunt had moved with her three children to Vienna and had married him, he suddenly got completely blind, due to atrophy of the optic nerves of both eyes. Nothing could be done. Then all the symptoms of a terrible disease, tabes dorsalis, set in, gr<sup>a</sup>dually, the typical gait, severe lancinating pains, then sensory disturbances in the hands, paralysis of the muscle of the



anus, etc. It was a real catastrophe. That Alice, the older child of aunt Rosa, was the daughter of Mr. Siodmak, was sure, but it was more than an assumption that the two boys, Herbert and Felix, were the sons of Mr. Hartmann and that they had inherited the syphilis. Both were mentally slightly retarded, and Herbert was an epileptic, and both were homosexuals. Herbert died at the age of about 22 in an epileptic attack.

To come back to my sister Else and my brother Carl: It was decided to send them both to Vienna. Else attended a very fine art school, and Carl a theatre school, which was in the same building as the "Theatre an der Wien". He studied there under professor Gothow-Gruenecke and also in the "Academy für Music und darstellende Kunst" under professor Forstén. He took a final examination there on November 18, 1915 during the war, and received a diploma. They lived together in the 8th district at Laudongasse 50, not far from the Schloesselgasse, where our aunt Rosa and her family lived. They both made good progress in their respective schools. They were supported by our mother and stepfather. My mother used to send them quite regularly packages with all kinds of food stuff. After about two years, they both came home to Czernowitz. Else brought many beautiful drawings and paintings and an enormous number of so-called act-drawings of nude models.



10



Elsie Mechner, c.1913



Carl Mechner, c.1915



Adolph 1921