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No Kosher Mushrooms in Bavaria

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No Kosher Mushrooms in Bavaria



when a modern Israeli
meets traditional Bavaria



Contento De Semrik

Chapter 1

The Lufthansa flight landed at Frankfurt Airport at noon and I was on it. The plane wandered as if lost, searching its way on the landing strip until it stopped with a huge groan and the engines became silent. My souls crossed the plane's threshold and my world split in two.

The life I had been familiar with up to that point remained on that plane and only the flight attendant's graceful smile warmed me and cast a cozy pall around me but slowly waned as I moved towards the passport control counter. The clear and cold voice of the German loudspeaker system broke my concentration and somehow erased all that once had been from my mind. A simple young Israeli woman longing for a life full of hope, promises, and wishful dreams, I was adventurous, looking to expand my own limits, break all the rules, free my mind, be wild and explore

new worlds. I was so daring and yet so scared, tired from wandering through airports and from so many sleepless nights. Prior to this moment, I was walking in endless corridors wondering how it would be; the man for whom I agreed to come to this cursed country was about to show up and when he saw me...

I was carrying a small suitcase on wheels, walking quickly – my typical speed – thinking of the two huge suitcases that would soon come out of the plane, pondering how I would manage to load it all by myself into the cart. The loudspeaker system continued to invade my thoughts with a language that, from now on, I would hear constantly from sunup to sundown: his native tongue. Eventually, the heavy bags were loaded on the cart with the help of a young man who stood next to me by the luggage conveyor. At last, I began to push the overloaded luggage cart.

I went out into the reception area. He was waiting for me, agitated and excited, waving an Israeli flag in his hand, a flag that was like the ones you hang on cars during Independence Day celebrations in Israel, a gesture that would normally make me feel very embarrassed and want to cover my face from shame. But I was too weary, too excited and I almost passed out when I finally saw his big smile combined with the small wrinkles around his eyes; his blond hair was also

a welcome sight for me. He was tall and lean, as if he had been pictured in a magazine. He was handsome, polite, somewhat embarrassed; he spoke English with a heavy German accent. With his other hand he was holding a small bouquet, handing it to me hesitantly as if he were trying to get rid of it. Who would be so silly to bring a bouquet of flowers to the airport? I thought to myself as I gave him a warm and cheerful smile. The bouquet was shoved into my bag at once, the flag disappeared somewhere, and his arms were wrapped around me. I was confused and exhausted from all of the airports, the long hours in flight, the standby lists, and the junk food I had had to eat. I wasn't sure how I felt about him – if there was anything at all – but his hug gave me peace and confidence.

We hardly spoke as he loaded the bags skillfully into the car, not complaining one bit about their weight or contents, which included shopping bags from the best American stores. In the U.S., I made an effort to buy whatever I saw and wanted, including gifts for family members in Israel, souvenirs, clothes and whatever else came to mind. Before we got into the car, he hugged me again, kissed me on my lips and said that he was happy, very happy, and that no one could be happier than he was. He said that he loved me, that I was pretty and that he felt like thanking me. Now the blue Golf

was speeding through the endless green countryside. My nose was flattened against the window as I stared at the beautiful scenery we were driving past. Dark forests with high trees replaced by green fields with scattered houses displaying red roofs, all reminding me of the beautiful postcards I had received. The car climbed mountains and hills, rolling down into deep valleys with water nearby. Everything was so green, so bright, so alive... so breathtaking.

Every now and then I turned my head to look at Klaus, his face serious. My Klaus – my Santa Klaus – grasped the wheel with confidence and sailed our mutual ship toward an unknown future. My stolen glances focused on his light hair, his blue eyes and sculpted nose, his handsome attractive profile, one that could force me to love him and had brought me here. Klaus was smiling. It crossed my mind that this was an Aryan smile, but he seemed so pure and sweet, putting his free hand on my hips, caressing my black curls, running his hand down my cheek. He then shifted his focus to the road and continued to drive safely. We listened to some romantic songs that Klaus had chosen for us, and then the song “Supergirl,” from the German band Reamonn that he had sent to me by mail a couple of months ago, began to play.

We looked at each other and soon we were singing the

song that for me brought back memories of our previous meeting. Suddenly, a chill went down my spine. For a moment, the ground was slipping away underneath my feet and I didn't know anything anymore. Was this the profile that I was going to see for the rest of my life? Was this man my destiny? How could it be that I once was a part of the American way of life – vulgar, noisy, cheerful, happy and the next moment I was trapped in a car driven by an almost stranger, forging into the unknown? How was it possible that this all happened so suddenly? According to my plans, I was on my way back home to Israel and now I was here. Yet that was not the only thought as I truthfully took into account that I could be on my way to the States to complete my studies. I don't know if that is the whole truth since I was still busy traveling and planning to visit all 50 states, attempting to satisfy my curiosity. Or was I on my way to America to build an interesting and exciting life full of action, dancing, singing and hanging out with friends? If so, then how in heaven did I get here? All I really wanted was a normal life with the occasional surprise now and then. I did not want the simple kind of lifestyle my parents had. Like most of my friends from my school and from my military service, I wanted adventures so I would have some special and interesting stories to tell my children and

grandchildren when the time came, but I didn't want to have any dramatic surprises either.

I was friendly, surrounded by friends, and everywhere I went I had left a trail of young gentlemen wanting to court me. I had some close friends who were like soul mates to me. Yet, if I had any dream at all, it would have been to come to America. The big continent always blinked from far away and then welcomed me so gracefully. But why Germany of all the choices I had? I didn't have anything personal against Germany, but perhaps I was biased. After so many years, through twenty-two years of memorial ceremonies and a trip to the concentration camps in Poland during my high school years, it was unthinkable that a Yemenite girl like me would find herself in Germany with a guy like him – Klaus, a total Gentile, non-Jewish, German guy. Now here I was, passing through the land of Bavaria not understanding one word of German, wondering why I changed my ticket for a flight to Frankfurt instead of flying to Israel. I was now totally dependent on this German guy I met in America who fell in love with me and promised to help me return to Israel anytime I wanted. How could it be that in a place as beautiful as this, with its green fields and calm serenity, the darkest of evil surfaced so many years ago, leaving so many victims in its wake? While passing through

the endless forests, one would think that such insanity was unconceivable.

As I accepted the reality of the situation, I found myself tired, excited and speechless as I sat next to my German Gentile man. I kept reminding myself that he promised to get me a ticket any time I wanted. The voice inside my head whispered, “Calm down and don’t panic! You can go back to Israel at any time.” I had to keep telling myself that I was there just to check things out, to try this on for size, no more than that. All my options were still open. The voice soothingly reminded me, “You are young and healthy. If this doesn’t seem right to you, return to square one, and go back to Israel.” And there was Klaus, smiling at me as if he had read my thoughts – again I was experiencing a funny sensation, the frisson of nerves and excitement that rocked me to the core – a feeling that I would revisit later on so many times. I found myself telling him in English that I was so glad I came there, that everything was okay, that I was enjoying myself very much, and that it was so beautiful, just like a postcard. Klaus suggested that we stop for an overnight stay in a hotel near the main road. He said that there was no reason to worry about the stop and that his parents would still be there when we eventually arrived at their home. “Won’t they be insulted?” I insisted. “No,

they won't be at all," he said. Besides, it was actually his parents who suggested the idea of stopping for the night, he told me. "How nice of them," I mentioned. "Honestly, I am so tired myself that I wouldn't mind taking a break."

After we stopped at a roadside hotel to check into a room, Klaus showed me the way to the restroom. As I stood in there, staring into the shining mirror, regarding the brand new soaps placed beside the sink, the extremely white toilet, and the neatly arranged towels – everything looked so clean and new – I was a bit hesitant to use the bathroom since it was too clean, too nice. The reflection of my face in the mirror proved to me just how tired I must really have been, and again I kept asking myself, what was I really doing there? What did I want that I had no answers to?

All of a sudden I felt nauseous. I barely managed to get to the toilet in time. I leaned over and threw up rivers of exhaustion, anxiety, and unanswered questions, all blended together. It all came out in three waves until finally I could put myself back together and feel like the worst was over.

I sat on the floor and cleaned my face gently with soap. I exhaled, pushing air into my hand and sniffed it quickly, checking to see the soured smell of vomit could still be detected. I brushed my teeth with soap

as I had no toothpaste, trying not to swallow it. I just had to get rid of that smell. I rinsed several times to make sure the soap was completely out of my mouth. I stared again at my pale face in the mirror, thinking that all I needed was a good night's sleep so my face would no longer betray me, broadcasting to all the exhaustion that I felt.

I went back to the inn, looking for Klaus. This place turned into a temporary home for me – a quiet and safe harbor, a familiar place. This is how I felt after being torn from my country, home, and family. In the meantime, Klaus prepared a light dinner for me. I stared at the shriveled, half-dead hotdogs and once again I felt the nausea approach, nearly taking over. I asked myself, “Are you really into kosher food all of a sudden?” And a voice from within reminded me how liberal I was about food back home and how I didn't make a big deal out of eating a “white steak.”

I apologized for not touching the food, promising that it had nothing to do with whether it was kosher or not. I also apologized since I couldn't taste anything and had to be satisfied with just a glass of water. I had told Klaus that I was not hungry and that I ate on the flight. He was disappointed by my loss of appetite. He then asked me if I wanted to eat something sweet, maybe a chocolate cake which was the specialty at the

inn, but I made a funny face and refused to eat.

Klaus, playing the role of a skilled porter, hauled the heavy suitcases up to the room which was situated on the second floor of the inn. He opened the door to the room and like a zombie, I dragged myself after him, my body aching for a place to collapse so I could close my eyes and slip slowly away, letting myself drift into another dimension.

I don't remember anything about the room, how I got into the bed, if I undressed or if Klaus helped me. I just remember the feeling of the crisp, white sheets against my bare skin and Klaus's warm body resting beside me. I was cuddled up, curled up in the bed like a little baby. I slept for ages, shaking off all the memories of the flights and the airports, the long hours of waiting, the anticipation, the anxiety and the thoughts of an unknown future. I let every muscle rest, sinking into a sweet sleep, wishing that it would never end.

The few rays of light that had penetrated through the thick curtains helped me feel better and more positive about my unclear reality. I felt that I was finally able to smile. It was Klaus who shifted to my side of the bed quietly, kissing me softly on my lips. "Guten Morgen," he said. "Gute, Gute," I answered, laughing and wondering if Klaus knew what they were doing in their "Gute" country. He leaned against me, his long

body touching mine, and started covering my neck with small kisses, tiny kisses like pearls on a necklace. He then moved slowly down to my breasts, showering each one of them with his tender kisses, touching and tickling each nipple separately as if he were giving each one equal amounts of attention so neither felt slighted in any way. He hovered over my stomach, licking, teasing, and wriggling excitedly. Our bodies blended into a wave of movement, and then the inevitable happened. Klaus penetrated me over and over with endless lust. The light from the window grew dim. I thought it was time to treat ourselves to some food; all of a sudden I dared ask him whether he cared for breakfast. I had become more confident after rest and “play” time. We laughed with joy. “Soon”, he answered. “In the meantime, please don't eat me.”

That afternoon, we spent several magical hours together; it felt as if we were a couple on our honeymoon. We visited an old castle that was actually once an ancient palace – its lanes paved with beautiful old stones. Klaus was holding my hand so gently the entire time. He wasn't reserved and expressed tenderness and warmth, kissing me endlessly and showing his feelings through words of love. I could sense that he hoped I would love it there, that he wanted me to love every single thing in his world – his home, his country, and

his parents that I would soon meet for the first time. These were the feelings and desires that he conveyed with his gestures and caring nature toward me.

The following day it seemed that everything took too much time. I didn't really understand why we had such long delays. The trip to his home seemed endless, but Klaus explained that since he lived in his parents' home and had his own room, we would not have the full privacy we would like and that we should savor each moment now. The bottom line was that we had a short period of time to spend together alone. "So let's enjoy every minute we can," he said as he bent over to pick a flower from the garden that was on the side of the lane. "Is it legal to pick flowers here?" I asked him. "No, it's forbidden, but for you I am willing to break some rules."

We spent another night at the same roadside hotel. I began to feel as if there was a decline in our passion and much less conversation took place. Not too much had happened, nothing to really remember. It became apparent to me that he was more interested in the physical aspect of our relationship... he longed for that kind of intimacy; it suddenly seemed more obvious that night.

"I want you lying close to me for a lifetime," he whispered while he was inside me, holding my shoulders

and my back, kissing my nipples and caressing my hair. I didn't answer or express any outward feelings. I was breathless and became frightened. "What did he really mean?" I kept asking myself. "Is he trying to tell me that he would like to marry me?" For heaven's sake, marry a German Gentile? What would my father say and what about his devoutly religious brothers with their long beards and their pious wives? I kept saying to myself that I should stop thinking so much and confusing myself. "Why should you care now about what your uncles think or feel? Are they here now?" They were not there. Only Klaus was there with his pleasant touch, so full of tenderness and so polite. They should learn some manners from the Germans, these Orthodox Jews; it wouldn't hurt them one bit, I thought and caressed his long, smooth back while my stomach pressed against his as I moaned with pleasure. The following day we continued our drive, but this time we stopped in some colorful small towns. The church bells rang loudly as they announced our arrival as a welcome gesture and everything was so strange... only the blond hair of the driver looked familiar to me and I leaned my head on his lap, searching for some confidence, relaxation, certainty, trying to get used to the touch of his hand, which was passing over my folded body, comforting me, as he did when we first

met in America, before he asked me to come and meet his parents.

I was in love with him, of that I had no doubt. He was able to touch my heart with his submissive shyness. He always gave me what I asked for, even what was not asked. He sent me passionate love letters, begging me to come to Germany. Slowly, I found myself responding to his courtship. Softening my objections and excuses – I had a thousand of them – I now found myself in Germany.

We drove more than two hours, and then Klaus suggested that we stop at one of the inns located along the way in order to freshen up. “We will arrive in Schwabenlände soon,” he said. “It’ll be better if we get ready here before meeting my parents.”

“What is ‘Schwaben-lande’?” I asked, not so sure that I pronounced the name correctly. “It’s the name of the southern part of Germany,” he said.

“What do we have to prepare ourselves for?” I kept asking myself. “Why do we have to stop if we are going to arrive soon?” I asked Klaus.

“I have to go to the bathroom” he explained, and I had to agree to that.

Along the way, I had to extract some information about his parents from him, such as what they were like and what kinds of things they liked. I wondered if the pres-

ents that I brought them, a miniature of the Statue of Liberty and a tablecloth made in the shape of the American flag, would be acceptable. But Klaus spoke very little about his parents. He said that his mother was a bossy woman and that I should not worry about it. “She wouldn’t let you even lift a finger; she always liked to do everything by herself.”

“Just like my mother,” I said. “She never let anyone clean the house or her kitchen.”

“The most important thing to me is that you won’t be offended,” he said. “She always has good intentions.” Now the car turned down small streets in a colorful little town like the dozens we saw on our way. At the end of town, I saw only a few houses as our car turned onto a dirt road. And there, in the middle of nowhere, stood his parents’ house. When Klaus parked the car, he breathed a sigh of relief, looked at me and said, “We’re home.” Klaus rang the doorbell and seconds later the door opened...

In front of me stood a couple that appeared to be in their sixties or early seventies, well-groomed and looking great for their age. For a split second we stared at each other, and I, in my usual friendly manner, approached Klaus’s mother to give her a welcome hug, but she stepped back and extended her hand instead, offering a weak handshake to my firm one. She then

said to me in English, “Nice to meet you, Dorit.” She regarded me curiously, almost as if she were angry with me. Suddenly, she said something in a clear voice that reminded me of an announcer on the loudspeaker system at the airport. I looked at Klaus, silently signaling my need for an interpretation.

Klaus offered, “I didn't think you were that small in the photo. You look totally different.” I had no idea if this was a compliment, but I preferred to consider it as one. I smiled at her without saying anything, as if acknowledging that it was.

Klaus's father shook my hand warmly and gave me a gentle hug. Klaus told me that they were saying that they hoped I would enjoy my visit to Germany. A trip, I thought to myself, that is what it is, just a trip. It was then half past three in the afternoon and we walked into the house. Klaus put the suitcases down and led me over to the dining room. At the Schmerling house, every Sunday at three o'clock, they had coffee and a “Schwarzwald” – a black forest cake made from layers of white and brown cake with cherry liqueur, whipped cream, and chocolate chips in between. It was a lethal calorie bomb: a terrifying yet appetizing inundation of sugar that must be eaten as soon as it left the refrigerator and not one second later. And no Yemeni girl from Israel, even if she were exhausted with fatigue after a