

Hollywood 5/1923-7

Parsons Chalopin meet  
P.S.

I took to San Francisco, the rainy city, with its strong, elegant buildings and quiet, busy people, at once. I have always, except for my childhood, lived in lands of bright sunshine - South Africa, Southern California, Ghana and Israel - and have never liked it. I prefer what I call 'weather' to climate and have an affinity for grey skies, long, soft rains, mists. It may have to do with a clinging nostalgia for the snows and winters of Latvia, but I think it is more a desire for a melancholy and ~~subdued environment~~ <sup>half-toned surroundings</sup> to ~~balance a sensitive~~ <sup>create a subdued environment for my</sup> and restless temperament. In my youth, thanks to my father's early hours in the dairy, I got into the habit of waking before dawn, and it has stayed with me since. I hate missing a dawn, before the world outside and my household wake up. The British, among whom I live now, consider me daft when I tell them how much they miss by not waking early, lighting a fire, and ~~enjoying the snugness of~~ <sup>enjoying the snugness of</sup> watching the sun come out of a ~~break in~~ <sup>lifting</sup> fog.

We only spent one day in San Francisco, most of it in the foyer and dining room of the St. Francis Hotel. That evening, we ~~took~~ caught a train for the overnight run to Los Angeles. I am now travelling in very unaccustomed luxury in a Pullman car with a sitting compartment. We sit up <sup>talking</sup> drinking coffee long after the other passengers have gone to bed.

My brother-in-law, Gregor (Grisha) Cherniavsky is probably one of the dozen top violinists in the world. As a small boy in Odessa, he won a gold Imperial medal and a scholarship to the ~~Imperial~~ Academy of Music at St. Petersburg. He was selected as a pupil by the great maestro Leopold Auer, who taught <sup>violinist</sup> Mischa Elman, Efrem Zimbalist, Toscha Seidel and other child prodigies and adult star virtuosi. He was the eldest in a family of five brothers and three sisters, <sup>§</sup> all gifted musicians; the others all being taught various instruments by their father in Krivoye Rog, where ~~he~~ he was a music teacher.

§ Leo, Jan, Michel (trio) + ??? and ? impresario in S. Africa.

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His father was also a musician at Jewish weddings, engagements and Bar-Mitzvahs, often playing only for meals to feed his starving family.

Grisha was considered the handsomest youth in the Imperial Academy, and the remains of those looks were still there in that smooth, broad brow under a mop of brown curly hair, the straight bold nose and well-fed cheeks, with a <sup>presence set off</sup> ~~complete~~ <sup>an</sup> presence in his expensive suit and shoes, James Branch Cabell must have imagined when he created Jurgen, the retired poet who inherited his wife's father's prosperous pawnbroking establishment. Grisha, of course, had no such father-in-law. He had married my sister after a stormy and somewhat scandalous love affair while he was on a concert tour in South Africa. I soon learnt that he was making more money out of real estate than out of the very high fees he charged for giving violin lessons to gifted children in the film world.

Grisha said, and I had no reason to doubt him, that he wasnt making money to become rich. He wanted to have enough to go to New York to open a school for poor but gifted violinists, like Leopold Auer. <sup>kid</sup> He was encouraged in this by the <sup>noted</sup> ~~great~~ <sup>Sol</sup> impresario <sup>Shurok</sup>, also a Russian, who was already famous and well established out East. He had had a setback with Zimbalist, however, whom he wanted to come to Los Angeles to join him: Zimbalist, a famous concert artist in his own right, had become first violinist in the San Francisco orchestra, and was happy and content to stay there. [Is there any need to say that I listened with eager ears and an expanding heart? This was the great world I had dreamt of. I was now part of it the first day I arrived in the United States. Now I couldn't wait to meet my sister. Not only would I see that tall beautiful girl who mothered me when my mother was too busy in her market stall in ~~D~~Winsk, but, with her romantic history, and as the wife of this wonderful, successful and idealistic musician, ~~xx~~

she would understand at once that I had come to Los Angeles not to be a law student but a student of the literature and arts of the world, and - who knows? - perhaps also an important contributor, especially since Hollywood was waiting for <sup>such</sup> contributions.

The family car at the station was a new green Chandler sedan with red wire wheels. There was a slim woman in a <sup>soft</sup> red hat with sunglasses at the driver's wheel, and two grinning, friendly-looking little boys at the back, and a small, very blond ~~fat~~ fat little baby boy in front. My sister and nephews waving us in, as the car was in a queue and had to move on. I had time to clutch and kiss my sister, kiss her little one ~~and~~ <sup>in</sup> front and shake hands with the two at the back. Then Grisha came with a porter to say that we would have to come back for the luggage <sup>later</sup> as it had to go through the customs. I only remember Westlake Park and my sister making a detour to show me the grounds of the new university <sup>on Vermont Avenue</sup> as we drove home. I don't think I saw down-town Los Angeles <sup>several</sup> until <sup>several</sup> days later, as we had so much to talk about at home, and the new semester had begun and I was enrolling late.

There can be no doubt about our common parentage; and her affection for me is so deep-rooted that I cannot ever stop wondering how brother and sister can be so different as Marusya and I. She must have been born with a fund of common sense and worldly wisdom, whereas I have to learn everything the hard way - by falling down and starting again. She has a will of iron, but you would never know <sup>it</sup> from her patient and persuasive approach to difficulties and resistance, whilst my instinct is to give way and compromise and then fluster and shout to gain the position I should have assumed in the first place. My impulses are sentimental, but in the end controlled by logic and reason. She is never sentimental, but in the end romanticism and not realism decide her most important decisions. I am not romantic, except as an indulg-

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ence. I have a materialist (though sometimes mystical in the sense of insoluble), approach to the development of the individual, of society and of existence itself.

feeling that the mystery of ~~existence~~

In the ordinary course of events, such differences between a brother and a sister wouldnt be important, but our case was different: First, neither of us was American, and our attitude to life in America <sup>clashed from the start:</sup> ~~was the~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ critical strangers, not <sup>as</sup> ~~of~~ natives taking many things <sup>for granted.</sup> ~~in their stride.~~ Then, our opinions and attitudes on the Russian Bolshevik revolution <sup>because</sup> ~~were~~ very important, because our house <sup>held</sup> ~~was~~ an emigre <sup>the</sup> ~~household~~ full of violent opponents and <sup>tolerant</sup> ~~judicious~~ observers of events in Russia. And, most important <sup>of all,</sup> ~~of all,~~ my sister stood in loco parentis and had a say, or rather influence, on my choice of a career, which would have been the ~~new~~ affair of my parents if they had been there.

To follow an orderly course, I should give a short account of my sister's past and present circumstances before dealing with my own career in the university and Hollywood: -

My sister ~~Marya~~, now called Marusya Abramovna by all her Russian ~~friends~~ friends, graduated from a Russian high school in ~~Dvinsk~~ Dvinsk and then joined a Jewish theatrical ~~groupe~~ troupe which was putting on Russian and Yiddish plays. Among the actors was a man with whom she fell in love and whom she was going to marry. It came to light that he was a married man with children posing as a bachelor, and also a rogue who had to leave Dvinsk in a hurry because of some swindling. All this happened ~~at~~ during the time my mother was undergoing treatment in ~~Koenigsberg~~ Königsberg, and, in order to spare her pain, she was told nothing about it. To spare my sister <sup>her</sup> ~~humiliation,~~ ~~also~~ <sup>also</sup> it was/decided that she should go at once to my father in South Africa. When she arrived in South Africa she was not yet eighteen, and found that

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her aunt, (a sister of my mother's), had persuaded my father to agree to a marriage for Marusya with a relation of my uncle's who was an elderly and very rich bachelor from Leeds, on a prolonged stay in South Africa organizing the sale of cloth manufactured by the family concern in England.

Nearly out of her head with grief, <sup>over her recent past</sup> and quite indifferent to what was to happen to her, my <sup>Russian</sup> sister agreed ~~to~~ to the marriage and found herself the bride of an elderly <sup>Midlands provincial businessman</sup> who wore check suits and spats, ~~she~~ played golf and kept horses for riding. She was the mistress of a big house in <sup>the suburbs of</sup> Parktown <sup>in Johannesburg</sup> for barely a month when she met at a party a famous young violinist who was giving a series of concerts in South Africa. Grisha not only looked like a ~~flashed~~ young god, but spoke Russian as they speak it in St. Petersburg. Marusya, for all her grief, or because of it, was more beautiful than anyone he ~~had~~ had seen <sup>while</sup> in the Czar's <sup>academy</sup> ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~other~~ ~~empires~~ <sup>or</sup> on his world tour. (This is how I heard the story in Los Angeles.) At the end of Grisha's tour, he and <sup>precipitately</sup> Marusya <sup>and</sup> left South Africa together and went to live in London where the Jherniavsky family was now settled. By the time my mother and I reached Cape Town the divorce from Marusya's first husband was through and she was remarried. My mother heard the story from my father on the train. What she said to him was always out of my earshot, <sup>but</sup> <sup>she</sup> ~~my mother~~ never spoke to her sister until my Bar-Mitzvah, which was six years later, although I spent several holidays with her in Benoni, a ~~ref~~ Reef town where her husband had a concession store on one of the mines.

<sup>By</sup> ~~In~~ 1917, my brother-in-law was in the Russian army, and later found himself in one of the 'White' armies in <sup>Siberia.</sup> ~~Manchuria.~~ He went down with typhus and my sister, who had been left behind in Moscow, found him in an army hospital <sup>from which</sup> and they made their way to Harbin <sup>in MANCHURIA</sup>. From there, friends helped them to make their way to San Francisco, and Sol Hurok, the impresario,

arranged for him to open a studio in Hollywood. He was a success from the start, as this was the beginning of the foreign invasion of Hollywood. A Russian name was a passport to success, and Grisha had more than a Russian name! He had a tone like a choir of angels. But more than a Russian name or tone from catgut sprung over a <sup>Guerinnis</sup> ~~Stradivarius~~, was the magic of ordinary string separating the plots in the new townships around Los Angeles. You would buy an enclosure between four wooden pegs and string one day for fifty dollars and the next week it was worth five hundred or more.

In 1922, our house in Mariposa Avenue was the first big comfortable Russian house in Hollywood. Grisha and Marusya and the children spoke Russian. Even the Mexican maids understood that kharosho meant good, spasibo, thank you, spekovni noch, good night, khleb, bread, chai, tea, and yedi khorta, go to the devil. There was always <sup>the Pascha celebration and</sup> feasting on the real Russian Easter, and nine out of ten records on the HMV machine were by Tchaikowsky.

When the exodus from Harbin to Los Angeles, via San Francisco, started in earnest (after the white armies were defeated), the princes and princesses came first, — the Galitzins and Troubetskoys; penniless, light-hearted, cultured and charming, without professions or talents, but ready to do any work, like driving taxis or turning the huge wooden drums in the film developing plants, without whining and without rancour; unlike the journalists and university professors who followed them and spent most their time trying for a handout. Marusya didnt like whiners and beggars any more than I did, and her admiration for the ruined nobility was based as much on their courage in misfortune and charming manners as on their blue blood. We used to discuss the Revolution then as a natural disaster, much as you discuss a ~~destructive~~ thunder storm <sup>which has destroyed your house.</sup>

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Later, when I began to see the October Revolution in its historical and political perspective, our views moved apart very considerably. She became the queen bee of the 'whites' hive, and I made friends with some radical younger officers and formed a strong friendship with a young refugee, Vadim Urenev, <sup>who had been</sup> an assistant director to Meyerhold, the great theatre director who was working with the Bolsheviks in Moscow. The young officers and Urenev had to leave Russia not because they were inimical to the revolution but because their aristocratic origin subjected them to suspicions and dangers at the hands of stupid and ambitious Red officials.

All this, of course, did not happen suddenly. It developed over the next two years, after I had attended the university regularly on a pre-legal AB course, and had joined the International Club, <sup>there</sup> and formed friendships ~~there~~ and with other students in the classrooms and on the campus.

The University of California, Southern Branch (UCLA), came as a great shock and disaster to me. Whether all American universities were like that then, or UCLA was a special case, I never took the trouble to find out, partly out of disgust with student life as I found it there, and partly because I became interested and involved in branches of knowledge and ways of living which could have nothing to do with student life.

I thought I was going to a university like Oxford, Cambridge or the other universities I had been told and read about. I came to a high school even more juvenile, regimented, pragmatic, patriotic, (with the emphasis on California, not the United States as a whole), than our educators would ever dream of attempting in the newly formed Union of South Africa. To save a long discourse <sup>for</sup> those who are really interested <sup>in</sup> the earliest editions of the American Mercury will repay study. The buffoonery and

vulgarity lampooned in those editorials of H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan are exact ~~first~~ reflections of the time. It was the beginning of the age of Rah-Rah-Rah on the American campus. It was the age when Billy Sunday's religion, President Hoover's economics and William James's educational theories were in flower.

I enrolled within a few days of arrival, and was welcomed warmly enough, as the first South African student, though there were already a considerable number of foreigners, ~~and~~ I would feel at home, I was told. My sister had gently suggested, and I had agreed with her, not to rush my fences. I had come to California to study law, and it would be better to enroll as a law student rather than embark on a vague general English literature course.

Once out of the Registrar's office, I was in the hands of eager, strapping young men - the career specialists. What could I contribute to the University's sporting life? I could realize how important it was for a new university to make a name for itself in sport, couldn't I? I could, but American football wasn't anything like our soccer. I hadn't even played rugby in South Africa, which might have helped. As for baseball, I would have to learn to hold a base-ball bat, let alone hit the ball with it. I play a good game of tennis, though. I'm specially good at the net in foursomes. But they didn't play tennis yet. "We're thinking of building courts in the next few years". I can see their interest in me is over. "As you want to be a lawyer, there's no need to stay here for a full AB degree - you call it a BA in England, don't you? You can go to the law school down town after two years." I am given two typed lists - one with subjects, some marked 'Musts' and one with hours. "You've got to arrange these so that you have three extra subjects besides the Musts,



and you must have six hours on three days and five hours on the other two. When you've completed these lists, bring them back." I go out in the same low spirits as a man who hasn't been a success at a party. But what bothers me most is that my syllabus clearly doesn't provide for time to become a great learned recluse or brilliant author.

The first friends I make are three Jewish boys in the logic class. One, Milton Zuckerman, is black-haired, black-eyed, with thick black eyebrows, like a Spanish or Mexican don, and just as graceful, too. I subsequently join a fraternity, and go through the boring horseplay which the initiation requires, only because he is a member. He reads Blake and plays the trumpet, is as gentle as a lamb and an excellent gymnast. If <sup>the higher educational system has succeeded in producing more</sup> only ~~the~~ Zuckermans <sup>not have</sup> ~~proliferated~~ in the USA there would ~~be no~~ Sacco-Vanzetti cases, <sup>C.I.A. hegemony and</sup> ~~no~~ Vietnams; and <sup>low</sup> ~~the~~ ~~Communist~~ types, like Harding, Coolidge, Nixon, wouldn't so frequently be the favourite candidates for President. <sup>I came across, with</sup> But he was an exception at UCLA. The majority of students, <sup>the educational</sup> system which produced them and gave them their social aspirations in 1922, made Watergate an inevitability in 1972.

I lost contact with Milton after I left the States in 1927. I hope he has now become a great trumpeter with his own band, or heads a very big legal bureau in Washington or New York. If he is dead and has left children, I hope they are <sup>among</sup> ~~some of~~ the few million Americans who voted for Senator <sup>Evidence</sup> McCarthy.

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The other two Jewish boys were sons of a Los Angeles rabbi. I don't have to wish anything for them. I know they or their <sup>offspring</sup> ~~heirs~~ are very prosperous businessmen. In their own ways, although we never became close friends, this rabbinical <sup>connection</sup> ~~relationship~~ served me well. It was Prohibition days in the States, and good honest liquor was hard to come by unless you had

doctor friends who would give you a prescription for whisky (for medicinal purposes at medicinal prices), from the local chemist. Jews, however, were allowed two gallons of wine each for sacramental purposes; not only the household head, but every member of the family. In no time, I, my sister and Grisha, the three little boys and ~~even~~ the two Mexican maids were on the Rabbi's register as practising Jews needing sacramental wine for the Sabbath and High Holidays. Sixteen gallons of wine is a lot of liquor, and the definition covered <sup>not only</sup> ~~the~~ rough red stuff the Italians produced in Fresno Valley, but the choicest champagne, if you could pay for it, from Rheims or Epernay. Marusya's parties became famous among a small circle of foreign stars and directors, not only because you might meet Chaliapin, ~~and~~ Pavlova or Mischa Elman there, but you could drink the kind of wine even the mightiest studio moguls were chary about providing. Her little brother was not only an English pet who said 'cant' with a long A, but had bootlegger connections of a very special order.

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Soon, there were too many Russians of rank and talent in Hollywood to be entertained in our house. The expense was too great and <sup>our house</sup> ~~the premises~~ were too small. One night, when Fyodor Chaliapin, the great Russian bass, gave his first concert in Los Angeles, Anna Pavlova had just closed a season there with her ballet company. After Chaliapin's concert there was a party at our house, and Russia's two greatest performing artists met for the first time since they had left Moscow six years before, during the October Revolution. Chaliapin had sent us his Russian cook, Kolya, a tiny old Cossack, without whom he never travelled, to help prepare the <sup>herbica and other</sup> Russian dishes, and there was an army of ~~the~~ daughters of the old nobility helping my sister. A friendly doctor sacrificed a whole month's liquor prescriptions to supply the vodka, and I drew all the sacramental wine we had left on the Rabbi's register to provide the champagne. It was a wonderful party. But it was

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nothing but a <sup>good</sup> party until Chaliapin arrived and he and Anna Pavlova met. Chaliapin stood over six foot six inches, and had breadth of shoulders to match that height; Pavlova was a little <sup>over</sup> five feet, and ~~was~~ beginning to shew the frailty of age under her iron muscles and ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> chiselled ~~metal~~ lines of her face. Nobody could think of the contrast in human terms. It was a meeting of two immortals, and everybody knew it and felt it. When their embrace ended, the tension broke and the party was gayer than before.

Chaliapin, at the piano himself, sang songs until late in the night, Kolya was ~~hauled~~ <sup>pulled</sup> from the kitchen and had to do a Cossack dance. Then Chaliapin got drunk and fell asleep <sup>Suddenly,</sup> as old men fall asleep. ~~A~~ Suddenly he woke up and started crying, explaining, pointing to me - "I want to be as young again as <sup>FOMKA</sup> ~~Effim~~ over there!" (My name in Russian was Effim Abramovitch - Chaim, son of Abraham).

The two results of this party were that the Russian colony decided that the strain on Grisha and Marusya was too great and they had to hire premises and furnish a Russian Club. The tears shed by Chaliapin over my youth made me a source of interest to one of Marusya's most beautiful friends, the wife of one of the journalists whom I detested. I would have cuckolded him gladly if ~~she~~ she wasn't soulful and vain as well as beautiful, a combination I had grown to dislike. Also, by now, I was seriously in love, myself, and that, I suppose, was the deciding factor.

nothing but a party until Chaitin arrived and he and Anne Tavisov sat.  
Chaitin stood over six foot six inches, and had breadth of shoulders to  
match that height. Tavisov was a little five feet, and was beginning to  
show the facility of eye under her iron mask and her official smile.  
lines of her face. Nobody could think of her connected in James form. It  
was a meeting of two intellectuals, and everybody knew it and felt it. When  
their courses ended, the tension broke and the party was over, then before.

Chaitin, at the piano himself, sang some until late in the night.  
Kojin was asked from the kitchen a Czech dance. Then  
Chaitin got drunk and fell asleep on the floor. A woman  
he woke up and started crying, explaining, pointing to me - "I can't  
be as young again as I was over there." (by name in Russian that fills  
Alexander - Chaitin, son of Alexander.)

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Louise  
Jean Harris