

“I don't want to live
with strangers.”

It's the summer of 1910.

Twelve-year-old
Dossi Rabinowitz is leaving
the crowds, heat, and dirt
of New York City to spend
the summer in faraway
Vermont, where the air
is fresh and clean.

Can a Jewish city girl learn
how to pick blueberries,
milk cows, and most challenging
of all, make friends with
the Meade sisters?

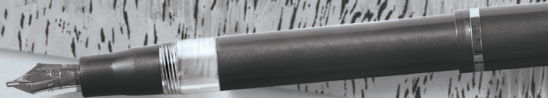


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JOHANNA HURWITZ

FARAWAY SUMMER



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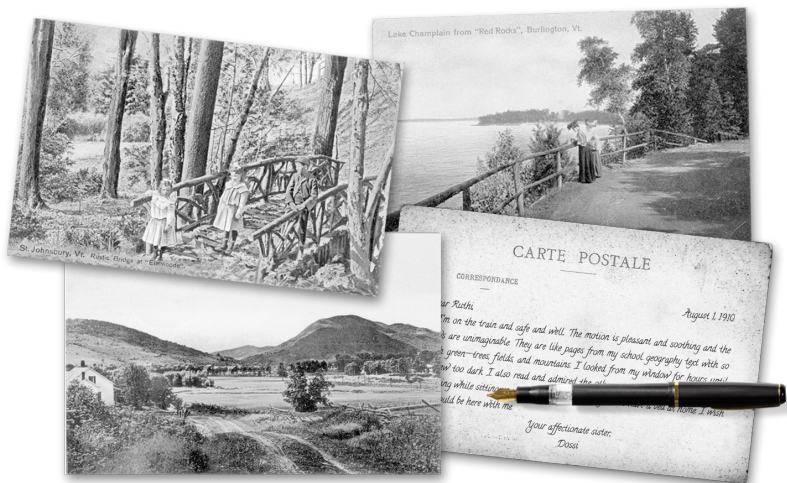
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JULY 31, 1910

My valise is almost packed. Tomorrow I'm leaving for two weeks to a place called Jericho. It's in the northern part of the state of Vermont. I'll be staying on a farm owned by a Jewish family who is related to a friend of my sister Ruthi. I know life in Jericho will be very different from what I know here in New York City. If I were going to the biblical town with the same name, it could not seem farther away.

When Ruthi said that she had filled out an

application to the Fresh Air Fund for me, I thought she was joking. How could my sister do such a thing without asking me? I'm not an infant. I am twelve years old, almost thirteen! But ever since Mama died last year, Ruthi has acted as if there were sixteen years' difference in our ages and not just six.

"Oh, Dossi, it will be a wonderful experience," she insisted. "The fund was set up to send young people like you away from the city and the dirt and the crowds and the heat. It's wonderful that the fund was able to find a willing Jewish family where you could stay. I couldn't let you go to just anyone. There aren't that many Jews in that area, but not only did they get a volunteer family, they are also related to our acquaintance Meyer Reisman. In fact, Meyer wrote to them and urged them to get involved. Now you'll be able to go and have a fine time in the country breathing pure air and eating wholesome foods."

"Suppose I say no? I don't want to breathe

air in another place and live with strangers. I'm satisfied being right here," I told my sister.

"Dossi. Think how sick you were all winter long. You hardly ever stopped coughing. I was sure you were developing the same horrible consumption disease that took away Papa. I don't want to lose you," she said, hugging me tightly. "You seem better now, but the country will make you stronger than ever. I'm sure you'll love it in Jericho. You'll have new experiences and make new friends. You may not even want to come home again."

I knew Ruthi was wrong about that. Truthfully, I was and still am very frightened of what is ahead of me. But once Ruthi has made up her mind, it's impossible to change it. "You said as soon as school was out for the summer you'd arrange for me to get a real job," I reminded my sister. I often help our landlady, Mrs. Aronson, take care of her children. That work doesn't put any money in our pockets. However, Mrs. Aronson says

she charges us less rent than she would someone else because of my help.

“I never promised,” Ruthi said. “Money is important, but we’re managing with what I earn. You’re too young and too smart to stay locked up inside a factory all day or sewing piecework at home. I want you to make good use of your time. Read books. Study. Perhaps your future can be brighter. Besides, you deserve a holiday from the Aronson children.”

It’s true that I love to read. I’m like Papa in that way. He was a real scholar and read many books before we came to America. Once we were here, he had to work too many hours, and his health got worse and worse. I have Papa’s red hair and blue eyes, but I know I’m stronger than he was. Ruthi shouldn’t worry about my health so much.

As soon as the letter came from the Fresh Air Fund saying that arrangements were made, Ruthi started going through my clothing. Even though she spends twelve hours a

day sewing in a factory, she began mending and patching all my clothes.

It appeared for a few days this week that I might not go away after all. There has been a strike of the railway workers, and we thought there might not be any trains running. The strange thing is that I was relieved and disappointed at the same time. But today we learned it is the freight trains that have been most affected by the strikers, and although there are some delays, passenger trains are going through.

So now my clothing has been packed and ready for tomorrow. I've added a few little things to make me feel more at home when I arrive in Jericho. I put in the family portrait of Papa, Mama, Little Velvel, Ruthi, and me. It was taken when we still lived in Russia. I don't remember posing, but Ruthi says I was afraid of the man with the big black camera. The picture lacks color, but when I look at it, I can imagine Papa's red beard and the feel of

Mama's arm around my shoulder.

Papa went off to America soon after the picture was taken. It was three years before he earned enough money to send for the rest of us. By then, I had almost forgotten Papa, and Velvel was dead from scarlet fever.

Now both Papa and Mama are gone too, and there are only Ruthi and me and the photograph left. Ruth and Hadassah Rabinowitz. Ruthi and Dossi.

On Friday morning, in the midst of my packing, I wished I had a good book to read during my trip. So I left my things and went to the free lending library and borrowed two new books. My friend Mimi Sosnov came with me. How I wished she were coming with me to Jericho.

"Don't tell the librarian that I'm going to take these books to Vermont," I whispered to Mimi before we entered the library building. "Perhaps it is against the regulations. If I don't ask, she can't forbid me. And when I

come back in two weeks, I'll return the books at once." The books will be three days late, but it will be worth sacrificing some penny candy to pay the library fine.

"This is a brand-new copy. You're the first person to borrow it," the librarian said, pointing to one of the books I had selected. It was *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery. I don't know if L. M. is a man or a woman, but the book looks interesting.

"Take especially good care of it," the librarian warned me.

"I always take good care of the books," I said, wondering if she guessed that the book was about to go on a long train ride with me.

"Let me see your hands," she demanded. "Are they clean?"

Luckily I had remembered to wash them before leaving for the library.

I took my books, and Mimi and I rushed out the door before the librarian could ask me any more questions. We giggled together all

the way home at my close escape. "Let me see your hands!" Mimi kept repeating, imitating the librarian's tone of voice. Now the books are safely inside my valise.

I've also packed my autograph album from school with all the messages and signatures of my classmates. They'll keep me company among all the strangers I'll be meeting. And finally, when I finish writing tonight, I shall put in this new book of blank pages. Miss Blythe gave it to me as a prize for the achievement in our seventh grade class.

"You love to read other people's tales. Use this to write your own story," she had instructed me. And now I shall.

When Ruthi realized that I was going to pack my bottle of ink and my pen, she began to scold. "The ink will spill on all your clothing. You'll look terrible."

"I'd rather risk being covered with ink than leave it behind," I told her. But then I remembered the library books. "I'll close the bottle

very tightly and then wrap it inside the undergarments that I've packed. That way, if it spills, no one will know about the blue stains but me."

Ruthi made a face, imagining me in inky underclothes, but she didn't say anything.

"Will you miss me?" I asked.

"Dossi, that's a foolish question."

"Yes, but you still haven't answered," I reminded her.

She stood for a moment looking at me. Then she began rubbing her eyes, which are always tired after her long hours of work. I realized all at once that there were tears in them. "I'll miss you. But I'll write and tell you about it."

"Don't spend all your money on postage stamps," she said, sniffing back her tears.

"You've given me fifty cents. That will be enough for many stamps, and candy and lemonade too."

"All right," she said. "Send me a card when you arrive so I know you made the journey safely."

“I’ll find one with a beautiful picture,” I promised.

So now I’m about to close my ink bottle and close this journal. The next time I write, I won’t be on Essex Street. I’ll be far away in the land of Jericho. Can you blame me if I am tingling inside with both excitement and fright?

CARTE POSTALE

CORRESPONDANCE

August 1, 1910

Dear Ruthi,

I'm on the train and safe and well. The motion is pleasant and soothing and the views are unimaginable. They are like pages from my school geography text with so much green—trees, fields, and mountains. I looked from my window for hours until it grew too dark. I also read and admired the other passengers before I fell asleep. Sleeping while sitting up wasn't so bad. Still, I'm glad we have a bed at home. I wish you could be here with me.

Your affectionate sister,

Dossi