

“Don’t send me back!”

Ellis Island, in the early 20th century.



- 1 **J**ACOB moved on toward the second inspection team.
 “You speak English?”
 “A little,” said Jacob.
- 5 “I see you limp slightly¹.
 Something wrong with your leg?”
 “No.”
- He began to sweat. The wound from the Cossack’s bullet
 10 had long since healed, but sometimes it ached a bit.
 The doctor marked something on his coat.
 “What that mean?” asked Jacob.
 “Your leg will have to be looked at. What’s three and three?”
 “Six. But nothing *wrong* with my leg!”
 15 “It’ll have to be looked at. Move on.”
 Jacob obeyed. Now he was a wreck².
Oh God, he thought, don’t send me back! Please!
 He entered a small room, immaculately clean, filled with medical
 furniture. A nice-looking young doctor with sandy hair looked at the chalk
 20 mark on his coat.
 “There *nothing* wrong with me,” Jacob blurted out. “You see! I healthy!”
 “Calm down...”
 “How can I be calm? I can’t go back to Russia. They *kill* me!”
 The doctor looked surprised, and Jacob realized he should have shut up.
 25 “Why?”
 “They kill *all* Jews³,” he said quickly. “Russians hate Jews.”
 “Yes, so I hear. Drop your pants, please.”
 Nervously, Jacob obeyed. The doctor leaned down to examine the
 bullet wound.
 30 “What’s that?” he said.
 “I got shot. Hunting accident.”
 The doctor looked at him suspiciously. “Hunting? Did a doctor treat it?”
 “No. I mean, *yes!* It all right. Honest! No problem! I healthy, make good
 American. You see.”
 35 The doctor straightened. “All right, pull your pants up. What’s the real
 story?”
 Jacob quickly pulled up his pants. “I tell truth. Hunting accident in
 Russia. I healthy. Look: feel muscle. Strong! Healthy! See?”
 Jacob was in such an agony of apprehension that Dr. Carl Travers
 40 almost laughed.
 “Yes, I think you *are* healthy,” he said. “And welcome to America.”
 Jacob was staring at him.
 “You mean I pass?”
 “That’s right. I have a funny feeling *you* were what they were hunting,
 45 but you pass.”

1. slightly: *légèrement*
2. he was a wreck: *il était anéanti*
3. Jew: *Juif*

Fred Mustard STEWART, *Ellis Island* (1983)
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