“Don’t send me back!”

Ellis Island, in the early 20th century.

Jacob moved on toward the second inspection team. “You speak English?” “A little,” said Jacob. “I see you limp slightly. Something wrong with your leg?” “No.” He began to sweat. The wound from the Cossack’s bullet 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!” “It’ll have to be looked at. Move on.” Jacob obeyed. Now he was a wreck. 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 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. “Why?” “They kill all Jews,” 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. “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.” 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 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, but you pass.”


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