

America 1956

After the unfortunate exam Rolf wrote letters to Harvard and the consulate asking to change the date of his arrival in America to December telling them that his thesis had suffered a setback, and that he would require another six months to complete it. Harvard simply halved his scholarship and re-admitted him in February, but the consulate argued that he could have acquired VD or tuberculosis in the interim and that for that reason, he would have to take another medical examination and pay for a new visa. Changing the passage to the middle of December had been no problem, a cabin berth would be reserved for him on the SS Maasdam.

The only person in America he fully confided in as to what had happened was his friend Art Kuckes, who had been the originator of the entire America idea. Art had just returned to the States at that time and had started working for his Ph.D. in nuclear physics at Harvard.

He had met Art in the winter of 1954 in Göttingen. Art, a blond, intelligent, unconventional physicist, was the son of German emigrants, who had left for America in the early thirties. Art came to Göttingen from MIT as one of the first Fullbright students. They had quickly become friends and had traveled together twice in France in 1955, after Art had transferred to Paris with an NSF fellowship for another year. On one of these trips they had begun to dream up a trip to the Far East, with Tibet as the ultimate goal. Rolf had seen most of the parts of Europe that interested him and were accessible at the time, some fancier plans were needed.

However, where to find the money? Art had a simple idea, "Look," he said, "obviously, at the rate at which you make money in your salt mine, it will take you 10 years of hard labor before we could go to Tibet. Why don't you come to America, there it will be much easier. To be free to work, you will need an immigration visa, but that should be no problem. I will write to my father to sponsor you." He did as he had said, and father Kuckes wrote Rolf a very nice letter offering to go through the official financial rigmarole for him to get the affidavit.

One day in February of 1955 Art had appeared in Göttingen and had counted 150 dollars in cash on Rolf's table: "Take these and buy yourself a boat passage to New York. You can pay me back later, I don't need this money right now. And now listen, you apply to as many good university graduate schools in the US as we can come up with, asking them for a scholarship to continue your Ph.D. studies there. That will cover your living expenses and will also justify your existence in the States."

Highly excited by this idea Rolf had gone into high gear. It was not only his wanderlust that spurred him on, but also the fact that in gas dynamics, the field he had chosen, there were no facilities left in Germany, they had all been dismantled, nor were there any exciting, young teachers, they had almost all been more or less forcefully deported. Moreover the future of this field looked grim in Germany.

Rolf had sent official applications to eight American schools. The applications included transcripts and letters of recommendations from three of his professors - including old B.! - In those days he was still looking good, the "journalist"! - Within six months he had received varying offers of assistantships from the aeronautical departments of the five best schools: MIT, Berkeley, Princeton, Cornell, and Caltech.

Art was delighted with the success of this campaign, and they had begun listing the offers according to their financial yield, when a sixth letter arrived from Harvard with an offer of a scholarship combined with a research assistantship from the department of Applied Physics and Engineering. This had completely turned Rolf's head. "Take the best school,"

Art had advised, "even if you have to crawl on your knees to satisfy their requirements. Nobody will later ask how well you did, but the name of the school will prove an invaluable asset forever." How right he would turn out to have been!

Rolf accepted the Harvard offer.

This had been in the fall of 1955. Everything had been in place when he met Barbara in February 1956.

What had happened to Rolf since he and Art had hatched this plan, and Rolf, in a show of complete self-confidence, had pulled the strings to America? How had he become so discouraged and powerless? He did not understand it then, he only felt truly depressed and bogged down, except when he was with Barbara. She was the one who gave him the strength to continue to make fast and clear decisions. It was not just the botched diploma. The issue was much more complex, and only much later did he come to understand some of the causes.

Prof. B. was not so far from putting his finger on his main problem when he called him a "journalist", in America he would have called him a "con-man". Less nasty and more to the point, his strength has always been intuition and artistic creativeness both of which are only of conditional use in physics. Had his intuitive powers been coupled with a strong analytical gift, he could have been a true genius, but he had not received that gift. Maybe he should have become an architect, but that occurred to him only much later. Physics, however misguided this choice had been, still was his great passion.

Later, from watching Susanne's mind grow, which is so much like his, he also learned that he had from his earliest school years been handicapped by a measurable degree of dyslexia, which he and several of his cousins had inherited from their grandmother Hammer. He should have been allowed to write with his left hand, and the fantasy of pursuing the exact sciences may never have occurred to him!

Dyslexia, seen from its positive side is an ability to think in pictures rather than in words or formulae. It is wide-spread among engineers and in fact enables them to visualize their machines, but it is of only very limited use in modern physics. Rolf had learned to circumvent this handicap and make it an asset by ingeniously compensating for the worst manifestations of his right-hemispherical brain organization.

However, not all of Rolf's difficulties were of his own making. As soon as he got to Harvard he discovered, that during his five years in Göttingen he had very nearly learned nothing. The professors of the once famous Göttingen School of Science, who were left after the ravages of the Jewish purges and the war, were totally un-inspiring and hence highly ineffectual in teaching. All of his conventional knowledge in the sciences he owes to Harvard, to where, incidentally, many of the best German-trained scientists had emigrated in 1936-38. He found that he had an advantage over his American co-students in handling experimental techniques and in working independently, but he barely could compete with them in tests of academic knowledge.

The really depressing result of his Göttingen experience was, however, a loss of self-confidence in general. He had always been able to sail over the abysses in his life on the wings of his unshakable belief in his inner powers. These wings had been broken by his years in Göttingen, and the "crawling on his knees" that he had to do to survive the competition at Harvard did not help in healing them. Barbara in her intelligent wisdom would help him survive the streak of hard years that followed the Göttingen disaster.

Art, who had briefly met Barbara on his last visit to Göttingen before he returned to the States in 1956, was not discouraged by Rolf's academic setback and continued fully to support him and Barbara and their plans. He sent a letter in return. "Come as agreed, my brother Walt and I will put you up in our apartment in Cambridge." He wrote. "My parents will pick you up, and we can spend Christmas together at their house in New York and then drive up to Cambridge." It was that simple!

Rolf passed his re-make exam without glory or mishap in November. Finally he was free. The SS Maasdam was to sail from Rotterdam in the afternoon of the 7th of December.

His leave-taking from Barbara had taken several months. They had discussed every aspect of their future life over and over again, from her wish to have children soon and to find a job, to who was going to manage the meager money they would bring home - he asked her to do that - to what they would cook together, and what kind of friends they wanted to have - many, from all over the world. Their house and minds were going to be wide open.

They had agreed to meet in New York as soon as she would have passed her exam in June. Rolf was certain that he could persuade Art's father to file another affidavit to secure an immigration visa for her. There was only Barbara's father who had to be won over. In that they would have to rely on Marga's help. Rolf was determined that he would pay for Barbara's passage, he was not going to take money from her father or his.

This American adventure was his choice. Their separation would be neither a test of their relationship nor an escape from responsibility. He wanted to make their life work, alone with her, far away from any help or interference by any of their relatives. They would have to learn how to trust each other completely yet not blindly, and he was sure that the hard work that this would require would be good for both of them and make their marriage strong. Above all they promised to never possess each other, not even in love-making, to never use the epithet *my*, and to give each other the individual freedom that each needed to grow. There was not now and never would be room for "romantic" delusions in their relationship. Seeing his serious determination Barbara was of one mind with him, and both were floating on a serene high when they finally separated from each other.

They all met in Hannover on the 6th of December late at night for dinner. Barbara, Gerhard, and Rolf had come from Göttingen - for once by train - and Rolf's parents and Dieter from Rodenberg. He was grateful to his parents, they had never tried to hold him back, and now let him go without burdening him with guilt, even mother, bravely, did not shed any tears. Father was serious and pensive, but Barbara's serene presence gave him strength and composure. After one last hug from everyone - Barbara whispered into his ear, "Liebster, I see you in New York!" - Rolf boarded the train to Rotterdam and left at a quarter past midnight.

He took a taxi straight to the docks and went aboard the big ship to catch an hour of sleep before they laid off around 5 PM.

He shared a cramped, windowless cabin containing two bunks with a middle-aged, non-descript Dutch man. As soon as they reached the open sea the voyage became very rough and continued like that without any letup. Fog, iceberg warnings, rain, and drifting snow at night slowed them down so much that, despite their saving a day by not landing in Halifax, they were two days late in New York. They rolled around in the Northern Atlantic for twelve days! Rolf swore that he would never go on another such a transatlantic voyage.

He was never violently sick, but even the smell of food from the ventilator exhausts on the upper deck was too much to stomach. He tried to eat something everyday, because with an empty stomach it was even harder to survive. He had spoken English when he talked to the Dutch purser who had seated everybody for the meals. This had turned out to be a mistake. Hearing his German accent the grouchy man placed him at a table with a bunch of unpleasantly aggressive German women who were following American G.I.'s to the States. His urgent request to be re-seated at a table of American and German students was never granted.

He did meet a few interesting people on this voyage, one was an older couple of some faded elegance, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton from New York, the other a shy medical student,

Brigitte Müller from the University of Freiburg, who was going to Milwaukee for a year of internship. She had attracted his attention by the books she read quietly, wound into layers of thick blankets on the upper deck. He was reading "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom", the posthumously published diaries of the Arabian years of T. E. Lawrence which father Lattmann had given him. It was an engrossing book but very thick, and when he got tired of it he borrowed a modern novel from Brigitte. Müller. She was nice enough, but she aroused no urge to test his freedom.

Actually he met the Hamiltons through Brigitte Müller. One day he sat in a deck chair next to hers when Mrs. Hamilton appeared and claimed the chair as hers. Graciously she allowed him to remain where he was and sat down in her husband's chair next to him. An easy conversation, led on by Mrs. Hamilton, ensued between the three of them at once.

The Hamiltons, now retired, had been in the foreign service for many years, stationed in numerous places all around the globe. He was an American who rarely appeared on the scene. She was one of those well-bred English ladies who are at their best after menopause, when the vexations of the games between the sexes are over, highly articulate, flirtatious in her own way, witty, tall of the best bony stock, but weathered down to where her skin looked like that of a turtle.

It occurred to Rolf that he had met such a lady before in the wife of G. E. Burkill, a highly regarded mathematics professor in Cambridge, England and the mother of Diane whom he had befriended in Athens in 1953. On a hunch he mentioned their name to Mrs. Hamilton and look and behold she knew the Burkills! They had met them during a teaching spell of her husband's at Cambridge. That broke the ice, and he advanced to being suspected by Mrs. Hamilton of being a brilliant young man with a great future in science. Not a bad patch on his burned self-esteem.

Independently of this he had really liked Mrs. Hamilton at once, and during their long journey she confided into him many an unabashedly caustic observation about the States, Britain, and other sundry countries. She was the most delightful diversion of the entire trip. On the last day Mrs. Hamilton extended an invitation to Rolf and Brigitte Müller for dinner at their penthouse apartment in lower Manhattan for the following Sunday. Curious and greatly honored, he accepted.

Another girl whom he had actually never noticed, he met, or better he was accosted by at the height of the confusion of disembarkation in New York. She was short and just a trifle stocky with a huge backpack. She suddenly stood next to him asking where he was going and then without a blush proposed to share her hotel room with him in New York. But by that time it was too late, he had already made out the white curls of good Mrs. Kuckes among the crowd on the pier, there was no longer a chance of escaping his ordained fate and indulge in a short tryst. - So it happened that Rolf arrived untouched and un-kissed on the virgin shores of America on the 19th day of December 1956.

It actually was a beautiful day. He had been woken very early in the morning by the total absence of the deep surges they had become so used to. It was completely calm outside, the sea was as flat as a mirror and the sun was just rising tinting the ocean and sky anywhere from blue-gray to a deep indigo-purple. The city was not yet in sight. He stood at the railing with a growing crowd of exited people, and when the Statue of Liberty appeared over the horizon he noticed that many of the returning Americans were actually crying. It was strange, he could not think of anything in his homeland that would move him to this degree.

Later the ship came to a standstill and a tugboat pulled up which very slowly eased them up the Hudson towards their berth at the pier of the Holland-America Line in Hoboken. For an hour they watched the skyline of Manhattan rise, blue-gray, out of the early morning mists before the low sun. Steam from the heating systems of the skyscrapers was drifting in white clouds through the cold air of the cityscape. It was a glorious sight.

They were tied up and an army of uniformed immigration officers stormed the boat,

who sat up tables in the dining room and began processing the hundreds of passengers, first the natives, then the foreign visitors, and lastly the immigrants.

The official he faced was a stocky Irishman who after sifting through his envelope of papers demanded to know whether he was a communist. Completely unnecessarily the blood shot into Rolf's head, "Look," he said sharply, "where I come from we know what communism is really like. No, I am definitely not a communist!" This was just shortly after the McCarthy craze had ended, and the question was probably a routine tease, but Rolf's tone peaked the officer and made him irritated. Rolf bit his lip and finally kept his mouth shut, but the guy spent 20 minutes in slowly checking every scrap of paper in his documents. Before he let him go he handed him an envelope that he rather sternly ordered him under the penalty of the law to deliver to the military draft office in Cambridge as soon as he would arrive there. Rolf had to bite his lip still harder not to boil over a second time.

It had taken four hours from the time of their arrival until he finally reached mother Kuckles who had patiently waited at least two hours on the crowded pier. She was more than a head smaller than Rolf so that he looked down on her white-permed curls that, he had noticed on the boat, most American grandmothers wore, but she was cheerful, and except for a sprinkling of "wells" and a few other American words spoke a fluent German with a strong Rhineland accent. She pulled her small round face into a smile of a hundred well-meaning wrinkles and in a concession to his being German shook his hand to welcome him.

They walked - did he mind? - off the pier to the next subway station where they vanished underground to emerge briefly at Grand Central Station only to disappear again into an underground diesel-train that would take them to Yonkers in Westchester where the Kuckles' lived.

Will he ever forget their address and telephone number: 274 Miles Square Road, YO5-5197? Expecting a mansion - all Americans lived in big houses, didn't they - Rolf was disappointed to be steered towards a tiny, one-story suburban "cottage" of surprisingly flimsy wood construction. On the inside this doll-house was stuffed with old-fashioned furniture of the kind his parents lived in, but everything was carefully ordered and immaculately clean.

Her husband was still at work and Arthur and Walter - their mother always used their full names - would arrive only in three days, so for the time being he could use Arthur's bed. "You must be dog-tired. Do you want to sleep a little?" she asked motherly, which Rolf gratefully accepted.

Here he was lying in bed in America. What a strange place it was, and it got still stranger during the following days. It was baffling, on the surface everything looked entirely normal, different from what he had expected maybe, but still the dress of the people, the houses, the countryside all was not that far from Europe. Yet there was a degree of strangeness, a totally non-exotic strangeness in the behavior of these people, in the atmosphere of this big city, and even in the appearance of the open country out here in Yonkers that he could not lay his finger on. What was it? How to describe it?

Mother Kuckles took him on a sight-seeing tour of Manhattan on the next day: 5th Avenue, Rockefeller Plaza (an ice-skating ring under a huge Christmas tree), the Music Hall *sens Rockettes* ("Ladies and Gentlemen this is the highest room in the world, so many feet high, wide," etc.), the top of the Empire State Building (a wire cage to keep people from jumping, why?) . . .

But the most confusing memory of that day was the noise in the streets, not of cars or people, but of hundreds of Salvation Army soldiers ringing bells to collect Christmas money from passers by. They were simply everywhere, standing dressed as Santa Clauses at the entrances to the department stores, on the stairs to the subway, on every street corner, rattling their money boxes and jingling their bells mindlessly. And as background to this bing-bing-bing, powerful loudspeakers continuously blared endlessly repeated Christmas carols: "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way!" from one store and around the corner barely out of earshot, ". . . a white Christmas. . ." with a question-mark upturn in pitch at the

end. The most horrible kitsch.

"You must not forget, when you get to this country," evil-mouthed Mrs. Hamilton had leered, very arrogant, very un-American, "that the people who came to the States were often from the poorest, most uneducated plebeian crowds in Europe. They did not have any taste!" At least she left the question open of whether there might be any hope that "Kultur" would ever develop.

That night he asked to be allowed to go to town alone, he wanted to conquer this city and maybe some of his deep prejudices by himself. He spent twelve continuous hours wandering through the cold snow slosh in the frosty canyons. He walked from Chinatown at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge through the East Side to Washington Square in Greenwich Village, and from the Battery to Times Square and Central Park. And he unearthed a wealth of new, incongruous information.

Chinatown was no great surprise, it simply looked like the photographs he had seen, and beyond that surface he could not penetrate. The small, withered, old people that scuttled through the narrow streets did not speak any language he knew and were not interested in him. He only drew blank, suspicious stares. The fabulous food that was cooked in those holes in the basements of the rat-infested brick houses he would only discover two weeks later. Yet, the smells meant nothing to him.

In an empty lot full of garbage near the East River he was accosted by a half-drunk hobo begging for a "spare penny" for more drink. Rolf tried to shoo him off in French upon which the unshaven character sang the complete first stanza of the Marseillaise for him in better French than his! Flabbergasted but laughing Rolf hugged him and gave him the quarter he craved for. Then he discovered the Greek restaurants stuck between Irish sailor bars at the waterfront down there. It was early in the morning the whores were still sleeping.

Further down, deep in the Lower East Side, fully by surprise he came upon the Jewish dry goods markets covering entire streets. He had only seen pre-war photographs of the Eastern European Ghettos and here was one fully preserved. The men wore the black hats and the long cork screw side-locks that he thought had disappeared fifty years ago even in the Russian ghettos. Bonnie and Tilda Iel, their closest "Turkish" friends, who had turned out to be Sephardic Jews, had taken Rolf and Gerhard to the house of one of their Ashkenazi relatives in Istanbul, because they spoke German. But this here was another world, although the markets were not far from those colorful places in Stambul.

He bought himself a "submarine" sandwich in a big, chaotic "Delicatessen" - this German designation, down to the "-en" ending, had fascinated him until he discovered that the good-looking "Wurst" with which the immense "Semmel" was filled was pure rubber, and the yellowish substance simulating "Swiss cheese" a tasteless plastic with holes! Only the "gurkies", onions, and garlic were authentically potent. After this lunch he reeked for the rest of the day.

Still he liked this part of the city. Its streets were full of colorful surprises and felt natural, an ambiance produced by the real living of real people whom he had no difficulty in understanding intuitively. The garbage, the rats, and the sleeping beggars he had to climb over on the way to Greenwich Village did not frazzle him. But the Kuckes's were aghast when he later told them where he had been and warned him seriously of the dangers lurking in these streets they had probably never seen. Yet Rolf had felt no fear at all in walking through even the worst areas along the East River. Was he naive or only a lucky romantic?

He sat on a bench in the old fort at the Battery and looked out over the waters towards that monumental French lady on her small, private island holding the torch of "Liberty". What was that "Freedom" with a capital "L" that every American mouthed with such emotional certainty? How could there be "freedom" in this land that was so afraid of the social consequences of an economical recession, and of "communists", blacks, beggars, and prostitutes, that it found it necessary to lock them up in prison? He did not have answers to these questions, maybe he would one day be able to understand.

He took the subway from Greenwich Village to Times Square. When climbing from the underground station he saw a direction sign to an air raid shelter, and then noticed that there were such signs everywhere. Standing in the narrow street with its high-rise buildings towering on both sides he imagined the havoc that a single German A-4 rocket would have created in this city had one reached it. He peered into the faces of the people passing him and tried to fathom their reaction in case of an attack on this town. And today there were atomic bombs around. The picture of the dome in Hiroshima came to his mind. How long would this country be able to psychologically survive a war after its urban centers had come under attack? -

It seemed to him, that in the end this question was about the "soul" of the American people, about their emotional strength and inner resources. In Europe there was a prejudicially long decided answer to this, there were very tough people in the Soviet Union and the Balkans, medium tough people in Germany, arrogant and overconfident but in the end weak Frenchmen, and "spaghettis" in Italy. - The messages one received from Englishmen were hard to decipher. He had found that they varied a great deal from person to person and whether you met them in England or "abroad."

The American soldiers had not impressed him, did they still have a strong soul if taken apart from their materiel and fat one-day-rations? How long would they have lasted in Russia or under the air raids in Germany? These were no idle questions to be asked in 1956 by someone who lived 15 miles from the East German border at a time when America seemed the only bulwark against the powerful armies of the Soviet Union.

Rolf would spend hours when he had to wait in a public place, on the bus or train watching with all the intensity of his senses the people that surrounded him - searching for their souls. But he soon found that despite all the talk about psychology in the US nobody could understand what he meant by this "searching for the American soul." So he played this dead-serious game only in secret. He was sure that the answer would explain most of what he found "strange" about America.

It had become dark. He found himself a dinner from one of the heated boxes in the wall of a Horn-and-Hardat Automat and sat in the echoing, empty, brightly lit place rather forlorn for half an hour to warm himself and write a note - on a paper napkin - to his beloved Barbara who curiously seemed light years away and very close at the same time.

Times Square with all its lights and shabby raunchiness struck him as a inconsequentially nervous place. How could one compare it with the Pigalle district and the *grandes places* of Paris, or with the sensual, depraved allure of Rome. However, Central Park South, which he came upon very late that night, did have an atmosphere all of its own, surrounded as it was by old-fashioned high-rise hotels that glowed through the branches of the bare December trees in the dark.

On the 22nd was the Hamilton's Christmas party. Mrs. Hamilton had called and advised him to take a taxi from the subway station to their place. Instead he once again walked deep into the lower East Side where the address was she had given him. The closer he came to where they lived, the emptier became the streets. Finally he was surrounded by huge, old warehouses.

What a strange place to live for this elegant old couple. He missed the number of their house and after walking back down the street a second time, found it on an enormous steel gate, the truck entrance into one of these storage houses. There was a bell after all. He rang and a huge black man opened to let him in. He put him into a freight elevator big enough to hold a car and off they rattled, four or five stories up. There the black man opened another steel gate, and he stepped directly into the Hamilton's foyer.

The hostess, supremely attentive, emerged at once from the large crowd of people and led him to the only person he knew, Brigitte Müller, who slightly bewildered stood with a glass in her hand among a group of four young people. He was introduced with a few words and

left to his own devices. A waiter, rather formally dressed like most other guest, offered him a glass of wine and some snacks. After a while he took Brigitte's arm, they had agreed to follow the local customs and use only their first names, and together they went on an inspection tour of the huge apartment. All doors were open from the bedrooms to the bathrooms - only the kitchen door was closed. Whenever one of the waiters emerged they could see a cook and several more people preparing food in there.

The place was rather old-fashioned, painted in some kind of dull reddish ocher and stuffed with old furniture, some undoubtedly antiques of some value. Original, 19th-century paintings decked the walls. Everywhere there were objects from far away countries where the Hamiltons had been stationed.

Rolf had never been on a party that size and neither had Brigitte. Faced with the shy woman at his side he turned most expansive and introduced them to several congenial looking guests. However, it was difficult to stall anyone long enough to get into a conversation trying to air, for example, some of the questions that occupied him since yesterday. Another problem was that the people they talked to spoke English so rapidly and peppered with so many words that he could only guess at, that he felt boorish. So they ended up in a corner stuffing themselves with the excellent tidbits that seemed to have no end and talking German to each other - until the hostess noticed them.

"A little homesick, are you not?" Mrs. Hamilton, asked. "This is not the "gemütliche" German Christmas that you are used to, right? But what have you been up too since three days ago?" Rolf told her about some of the bewildering impressions he had collected since, and tried to pay her a complement by telling her that some of her predictions had already come true. "I am not surprised, and that is why I told you these things, but you have to realize that this is not a subject of conversation in this country." She rebuked him kindly. "In fact it is considered very *gauche* to criticize or expose the poor taste of the low classes in America in public! They are quite sensitive to that - at least here on the East Coast. The educated liberals maintain that there is really no class structure in the US!"

Rolf got a red head and offered some apology. "Oh, no, don't misunderstand me," she continued, "between you and me that is perfectly alright. I am only trying to warn you, keep your sharp tongue under control when you get to Harvard, there they have a true inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* Europe."

"To ease your home sickness," she came back to her first premise and Rolf exclaimed, "I don't think I am homesick at all." "Alright, alright!" she continued with a look at him that said, don't interrupt me! "When you get homesick, as I know you will in a few months, I recommend good German food. In fact, one of the best remedies for German homesickness is whipped-cream on top of a real Viennese coffee and that *is* available in Germantown, the lower end of the Bronx. You see, New York is an agglomeration of very provincial villages each inhabited by another ethnic group. You called the Lower East Side a ghetto, that is not really true, because everybody is quite free to move out, but the smells, tastes, and old habits keep people living in a group. Do go up-town and explore the German 'ghetto', the "Schlag" is quite authentic there and the coffee way above average!"

Of course, time would prove that she had been right. In the second year in Cambridge Rolf and Barbara were sometimes truly sick and tired of America, and that is when they rediscovered his mother's old tonic, "Schlagsahne," and Rolf begged off Mrs. Hamilton.

His first Christmas in America! Thanks to the good "German" Kuckles and their touching concern for him, it did not turn out to be much different from home. Maybe because at Christmas in his parents house the old subterraneous, regressive tensions would invariably poison the holidays, it was even nicer at the Kuckles' house than at home.

On the evening before Christmas Eve, father Kuckles took Rolf in his brand-new, green Mercedes 219 to buy last-minute presents in a local, suburban, shopping center. His dear, jolly "Sophichen" wanted a good, new set of flatware for daily use. Father Kuckles decided that they had to be knives from Henckel's "Zwillingwerk", nothing less would do. After comb-

ing through several stores, an old German-Jewish knife-shop owner gave him the "deal" he was looking for. Then it was Christmas cards that were needed, and here Rolf had another prejudice-confirming experience: the bottomless kitsch he helped sift through cannot be described!

There was a real Christmas tree, albeit with simple, white electric "candles" that flickered on and off. Art and Walt drifted in late in the afternoon, and the boxed presents were all stored under the tree. Rolf too got a present from Art's father and a very special one: after some grumbling, softened by the warm atmosphere, he promised to sponsor Barbara's immigration!

On Christmas Day everyone was packed into the car, Art and Walt under protest, and driven to a Lutheran Church in the Bronx for service. There a new surprise waited, the church was comfortably heated and the benches had plush red upholstery! Wouldn't this be a nifty place for his father, Rolf thought, here he could sleep in true comfort! But he realized that his father would never have gone to such a church, the cold bareness of their Protestant churches were part of his concept of religion. After singing many of the familiar songs, a group of "ushers" distributed small envelopes to everybody, into which the parishioners were to put their money. Rolf noticed that Father Kuckes stuffed a ten-dollar bill into his! He was truly aghast about this enormous contribution and was told that the church existed exclusively of these donations.

On the following two holidays - only Art and Walt were on vacation, everybody else went back to work. - Art took Rolf along to visit several of his old school friends, while Walt slept through the day. At one of his friends, Rolf picked up a recipe for a glorious, very dark, very heavy English fruit cake, which later Barbara would bake five weeks before every Christmas for many years to come: Their first American Christmas tradition.

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