

# *Julia Dieno*

A sad-eyed man is standing beside a newly-made grave; a little girl of two years is at his side holding a bunch of forget-me-nots. The young Bessarabian schoolmaster has lost his wife; the little dark-eyed-girl has lost her mother. Thus opens the first chapter of my mother's life, and it begins like the history of Bessarabia-sombeely.

Her father does not marry again, as his two recent unions have ended unhappily. His son, David, is sent to a German university, while his daughter Julia is given a foundational training that is never-to-be-forgotten. Often, as the twilight creeps over the rolling Bessarabian plains, the schoolmaster takes out his violin and begins to play the melancholy melodies of the southern Slavs; Julia, wide-eyed and wondering, stands beside him in sympathy, and silently catches the elegiac spirit that is to be a dominant strain through out her life.

One day, when Julia is seven years old, the town of Teplitz is very much excited: David Dieno, the schoolmaster, is very ill. He requests that he be taken to the schoolroom, and bid each little pupil a last farewell. This event makes a vivid impression upon the little girl's mind. For a while her father regains strength and childish laughter again pervades the house, but her joy is fleeting; David Dieno closes his eyes nevermore to look upon his beloved Bessarabia.

The younger David, like the older, steps into his father's position, and becomes the schoolmaster of Teplitz; it is in his home that Julia finds a lost happiness. Here, among books, music, and culture she grows to young womanhood. On her eighteenth birthday, a dark cloud arises which is soon to wave a spell of gloom over the house. Mrs. Dieno dies. Julia, noted for her energy, industry, and excellent cooking, presides over the home.

One day a group of gypsies pass through Teplitz, and one of them, a woman ventures to David Dieno's doorstep to tell fortunes; he tells her to leave at once. The gypsy becomes very angry and says, "You will some day marry a red-haired woman and be very unhappy."

One year passes and the prophecy comes true. The woman he marries does have red hair; she is well educated but very arrogant and unkind. This woman is so commandeering and fault-finding that Julia leaves the home, although much against her brother's wishes. Being a strong, robust girl she works for her living.

The fine, sterling qualities of the girl attract many suitors, but as yet she does not wish to marry. David insists that she must not work, and so she accepts the proposal of a young, well-to-do Bessarabian. Far in the distance comes the strain of a violin; underneath the flowing melody is a touch of pathos. Her husband dies eight months after their marriage; her little baby dies at birth.

Gone the lovely acacia and the peach blossom, and where is the singing lark with his sweetest song? The distance hills are black as if in mourning; only the Pruth and Dniester flow majestically on. The black Sea swishes, rushes angrily against the shore, and moors under centuries of sorrow. here, at evening, sits a young

girl wondering over life's deep problems, and here the sea communicates its message to her: come to me, I will carry you to a new country. She leaves Teplitz, the Bessarabian province, where Katherine the Great's colonization granted free land to those who immigrated from Germany to Russia.

She goes to America.

A young woman of great courage crosses the Atlantic Ocean, speeds over the United States, and ends her journey on her (half) sister's farm near Yankton in south Dakota. Her heart sinks at the sight of the new unsettled country, and the rough manners startle her. The prairie touches her; it is like her Bessarabian steppe. She wastes no time in regrets but plunges into work, and soon establishes a name for her splendid qualities. This brings her suitors and she marries a young widower, Weidenbach by name; he has a little two-year-old daughter and is a Bessarabian.

Together they till the soil of their farm, but the earth does not yield fruitfully so they move into what is the beginning of a town, Parkston. her bright young husband establishes and develops a fine business; hand in hand they work their way to prosperity. through sickness, dark days and bright days their ten children thrive. A haunting melody is wafted from the shore of the Black Sea; it is akin to sorrow. Pauline, bright little Pauline, burns to death. The tragedy weights heavily on the young mother's heart, but with sweetness as lovely as her dream-remembered Acacia she says, "bud on earth, flower in heaven."

With characteristic energy and fire, she plunges into her work steadily developing into a brilliant woman of great wit and charm. She gives her children the best things life has to offer her sons graduate from schools of learning and her daughters are educated in music, painting and domestic science. A remarkable willpower results in eight of her children becoming proficient musicians.

Born in a beautiful land she is a lover of the beautiful. her oleanders glow brilliantly and her geraniums are the best in town. Her ferns are remarkable while her specimens of plant-life are many, varied, and odd. She could easily have become a great botanist, but God chose her to be a mother. She weaves many beautiful thoughts into her laces, doilies, and bedspreads. They are the work of an artist-hand.

From Bessarabia comes sad news: David Dieno is dead. As I look up into her eyes she tells me that now the letters from Russia will cease. later I find this expressive poem in one of her notebooks.

## Heimweh

Fern von der Heimat, im fremden Lande,  
Einsam bin ich and allein----  
Zerschnitten sind nun alle Bande,  
Es leuchtet mir kein Sternelein.  
Die Eltern mein and die Geschwister  
Sie sind so weit, so weit von mir-----  
Und nur das Wehr in meinem Herzen  
Das ist ein steter Gast bie mir.

## Homesickness

Distant from the home, in a foreign country,  
I am lonesome and alone---  
All associations are now cut apart,  
No stars shine upon me.  
My parents and my siblings  
You are so far, so far from me-----  
And only the defense in my heart  
That is a constant guest with me.

Into this rich and fruitful life comes the influenza; she is stricken with the fever and is almost taken away. her youngest daughter nurses her back to health, but her strength is never the same. now comes the beginning of the saddest strain of all; the dreaded and treacherous hand of diabetes touches her. This is the hardest thing for her to bear, for in her heart she is still young and strong. Her loving husband builds a beautiful home for her, but the house is empty, all the children are gone. There are no merry voices or patter of sturdy little feet. It is impossible to sit idly by when she has been one of the most dramatic and active figures in life. her children rally to her side, but she seems to think that her life work is finished.

With a fortitude as fine as that of her mother, my youngest sister stands watch over her bed as well as my father. Suffering untold agony my mother sheds no tear. Calmly and sweetly she asks Gertrude to push the largest cedar chest near her bed; here she divides her handiwork among her children. At the bottom of the chest are two black veils, "one for you and one for the door" she says.

In the distance I hear the faint sound of a sweet melody; in its dreamy cadence comes the rise and fall of an enchanted violin. A young and beautiful girl is singing vibrantly and joyously it is my mother with her father.

Julia Dieno deceased March 9, 1928

Milton Weidenbach deceased January 12, 1972

Story from his files

Retold in 'Julia Dieno' by Gertrude Weidenbach

Reprinted by Julie Stelzer (Great-Granddaughter)