

# Lazarus What's Next?

A Memoir

By Renate Horney

## Prologue

So, Lazarus, my invisible friend, my guardian angel, you want me to write my memoirs? Is that why I felt you pushing me to move into this lovely little house on top of a hill from which I gaze over the wide horizon, over rooftops and hills? It is the first house in which I have lived alone, the first that is really me, all me. It isn't my parent's, nor my husband's, nor my children's, it's truly my own, unfettered by strings. A place that gives me the inner space to let my mind wander back in time.

Do you want me to write about the unusual family you plunged me into? About my brilliant mother, whom I loved dearly, but who was much too busy helping and healing others to have time for those close to her? About my childhood—a time when I learned to read and write, climb trees, and swim; a time when I learned to feel free and love nature but was also humiliated and hurt; a time when no one taught me to face emotions of love, hate, pride, and fear? About my three marriages to vastly different men?

Or do you want me to write about my thirty-four colorful years in Mexico City? Years that are deeply embedded in my heart, for then the beautiful small city still had crisp, clean mountain air, and our life was imbued with a charm, an innocence, and a simplicity which overpopulation and pollution have now wiped out. Years which, in spite of hardships and little money, reflected many precious human values not measured by power and dollar signs.

I believe that is what you wish me to write about, along with the challenges and obstacles you threw in my way, giving me an opportunity to learn some hard lessons in this round of physical existence. You always helped and guided me. I felt your inspiration. At times I heard your voice giving me precise commands, at others you just answered my questions, and I knew what I had to do. But can I look into the rearview mirror of my life without the fuzz of my ego distorting the picture? Probably not, but I can try to brush away some preconceived ideas of what was good and what was bad, what really fortunate and what disastrous. Who were my friends? My foes? Or were they all helpers in a life of learning, bringing joys and sorrows, sunshine and storms?

And, of course, you want me to write about my search in the mystical realm for the meaning of life. In 1957, recently divorced and in desperate need for that most illusive "me," I had joined my friend Lore and two other ladies in sessions communicating with spirits. By placing our hands on a small wooden table, we invoked the spirits to come and spell out messages for us.

To my great surprise, I felt the table come alive, felt my hands tingle with vibrations. Suddenly the table tilted to one side, signaling for us to start reciting the alphabet. When the table lowered, indicating the correct letter had been reached, we wrote it down and started over again. Slowly messages, often philosophical ones, were spelled out for us and signed by the sender. Although it

seemed impossible for anyone to manipulate the table and create the vibrations, I remained skeptical.

For the next session, Lore and I were alone. We laid our hands on the table and invoked the spirits. Suddenly the table not only tilted but lifted up off the floor and started to float around the room, first slowly than faster and faster, with us running behind trying to keep our hands on top. We laughed, we were out of breath, but the table kept spinning its merry dance. Lazarus, you must have had a good time, for not until I finally pleaded "Stop, I believe you," did the table settle down.

During the next few months, many messages, always starting with "dearest Renate," were directed to me personally. Since the other two ladies hoped to hear from their departed spouses, I became so embarrassed I quit, feeling they would be happier without me.

And then one day, while I was visiting Lore, you introduced yourself to me when she asked, "Would you like me to read the messages we've received since you left?"

"Of course," I said, and she proceeded to read.

Suddenly she stopped, looked at me and then went on saying, "Oh, this one came for you, it reads, 'Dearest Renate, we are always, always with you. Signed, Lazarus.'"

"And the date?"

"The twenty-ninth of November," she said. My heart missed a beat. That was my birthday. None of them had known, nor had they had the remotest wish to receive a message for me.

That was typical of you, Lazarus, for you do have a tremendous sense of humor. Who else could have thought of guiding me through such a crazy life? But what are you? My super ego, my higher power, a spirit guide and friend from another life, or, as Einstein calls it, cosmic consciousness? Maybe all of those, for aren't we all part of One? In any case, for me you are simply Lazarus, my dearest friend.

So now, with your help, let me unravel the pictures of light and dark, the tales of laughter and tears, the colorful adventures of my life in three different lands. And while I tell the tale, let me try to grope for the meaning of it all.

## **Chapter 1**

In the Beginning...

1916 - 1925

My father always said, "The desire for a son is the father of many daughters." In 1916, I became their last "desire." My two sisters, aggressive, dark-haired Brigitte and smiling, blond, blue-eyed Marianne, had preceded me. I, a brown-eyed and blond-haired girl, tried my very best to remedy this slight oversight of nature by becoming a tomboy. They named me Renate, which comes from the Latin *renatare*, meaning "the reborn one"-a fitting name for my developing philosophy of life. My arrival delighted Marianne. Brigitte, on the other hand, remained reserved, not having made up her mind whether or not I represented competition or a positive ally in her jealous struggle with Marianne. This ambiguous situation continued, and I would use it to my advantage whenever I could. Let them fight it out; I would be friends with both or whichever appeared most convenient at the moment.

I loved my mother very much, and that, along with a deep feeling of respect, never changed. To this very day, I can visualize myself once standing in my crib, holding onto the rail, yelling my head off. Because my bedroom was on the third floor and a door separated that staircase from the second floor, no one could hear me downstairs. I had been ill and must have been crying for a very long time before the door finally opened and Mother stretched out her arms, lifted me up, and released me from my prison of fright by enveloping me in her arms. Mother lived for her work, but her helping arms were often open to me.

Lazarus, do we choose our parents because they will present us with the challenges we have chosen for this life? Or are they part of our karma, cause and effect created by ourselves in former lives? Whatever the reason, I felt lucky to be part of an unusual family.

Although his father had been just a village schoolmaster, my father, Oscar Horney, obtained doctorates in law, political science, and economics, but he loved to delve into philosophy. He started his business career by jumping to the top, only to tumble deeply because of inflation and illness.

My mother, Karen, was born in 1885 in Hamburg, Germany, to a beautiful mother, Sonni, and a much older father, Berndt W. Danielsen. A sea captain of high rank, he was a feared, quarrelsome despot whose long absences were welcomed as an interlude of peace. My mother sought happiness in her escape to school.

Her life as a remarkable, pioneering woman stands out in bold relief. Little seems accidental, for she had an innate feeling of destiny. Although her father wanted her to stay home and replace the maid, she struggled to enter the gymnasium (the first high school for girls had just opened in Hamburg) and then the university to study medicine. This at a time when universities were just debating whether to accept women for medical school. Amazingly, as early as 1910, psychoanalysis, although barely in its infancy, became her goal.

During World War I, Mother worked at a neuropsychiatric clinic. In 1915, she received her doctorate and went on to study psychoanalysis. But here, she soon found herself at odds with Freud's theories-theories, she noted later, made by men and for men. Her life's work and struggles were defined by the problems that surrounded her. But more than anything, she constantly searched for the voice within, for love, for new ways of understanding and expressing these ideas. Her karma did not allow her to be content, for only her restless search would

produce the thought and the creative work she developed. Her inner struggles were her teachers, her blessings.

Mother wanted to give us all the spiritual freedom she had missed as a child under the shadow of her fanatical Protestant father. When angered, he would not only cite the words of the bible but would actually hurl the book at his wife. No wonder Mother educated us to be free from hypocrisy and to be true to ourselves.

She did, however, have us baptized, belatedly. At the age of three, Brigitte and I were each taken to have the holy water sprinkled on us in a solemn family occasion. Not having been warned, we protested loudly. Brigitte told the pastor that Mother had told her to wash in the bathtub, while I just scolded him for getting me wet. I have a hunch Mother enjoyed our spontaneous indignation.

We lived at the edge of a Berlin suburb in a three-story house, surrounded by a large yard with lawns, a playground, vegetable patches, fruit trees, and berry bushes. Across the street were a park with hills, a small lake, and the Berlin woods beyond. My favorite private place was a platform on our weeping willow tree. There I read my first book, played with dolls, and with my girlfriend Nati, loudly sang rhymes we had composed to express our opinions.

How proud I felt when Mother allowed me to escort her to the horse-drawn bus which took her to the subway, which in turn left her near her office in town. But then came a new era, the age of the automobile. Father surprised us with a bulky chauffeur-driven convertible.

"Now that we have a car," Father announced, "we even have time to drive for a weekend to the Baltic Sea." The Baltic Sea! I envisioned long vacations looking for blueberries in the woods and playing on the beach.

Full of excitement and marvel at this new invention and the freedom it gave us, we all bundled up with hats and scarves to protect us from the dust of unpaved roads and drove off.

Although only five years old, I can still remember the beauty of those tree-lined country roads, wheat fields dotted with blue corn flowers and red poppies, and large stretches of pine forests. We progressed slowly, for the thin tires were easily punctured by sharp stones. Soon covered with dust, hot and thoroughly shaken by the bumpy road and lack of springs, we longed for that promised cool bath in the sea. But more flat tires and dusty hours lay ahead before we at last arrived exhausted at our destination.

Filled with anticipation of that refreshing swim, we ran to the beach and into the water.

"Watch out," Mother called, "the sea is filled with jelly fish." Disappointed, we quickly retreated before getting stung.

"Father," I asked, "will you buy me the pretty sailboat I saw in a shop window so I can play at the edge of the water?"

"No," Father answered, "we have no time. Tomorrow we must return."

Yes, a new era had arrived. One that had no time. Time and space had shrunk. No more contemplation while the horses trotted along, but hurry up, see more, and do it quickly.

And then came the day when Father brought home the first home-built radio in a long rectangular box. What excitement! As Father turned the dials, it crackled and beeped. Finally hearing a foreign voice, he exclaimed, "Listen, that is Norway." Even though overwhelmed with awe, we hardly realized that something momentous had happened. The outside world had penetrated our living room.

Summers were spent on islands of the Baltic or North Sea, where we rented rooms from fishermen whose kitchens we shared. Due to the rampant inflation of the time, money that Father sent us became worthless by the time it reached us. So we dug mussels in the sound at low tide and picked berries for dessert.

With mother always busy with patients and lectures, we were fortunate to have a second mother, our step-grandmother, whom we called Grossmutti. After being widowed, father's father had married this wonderful young farm woman who gave him two sons, Walter and Berndt, close to my age. Grossmutti epitomized the incarnation of love, motherhood, and caring, everything our mother was not. All day she cooked and baked, darned our socks, and brushed our hair. We adored her down-to-earth warmth, her bubbling, smiling personality.

Grandpa lived in a small farming village in an apartment above the one-room school in which he served as schoolmaster. I will never forget one magical afternoon before Easter when I, a six-year old, helped to bake the cakes. After Grossmutti had rolled out the yeast dough and placed it on large, rectangular metal sheets, I was allowed to assist her in dotting them with plenty of butter, sugar, and nuts or apples. Since she had no oven, we, like everyone else, took the sheets of dough to the village-square community oven which was used only before big holidays like Christmas or Easter. There we saw villagers and peasants who had come from their farms on horse carts and bicycles to bring their unbaked cakes. It was dusk. People were milling around, waiting for the bakers with their long poles to push their cakes in or take them out of the oven. I stood transfixed, gazing into the red-hot tunnel in which I could see the cakes bubbling and browning. The aromas were tantalizing and the atmosphere full of expectation and magic. I felt transported into a fairy tale in which cakes and candies hung from trees.

When his sons, Walter and Berndt, needed to attend middle and high school, Grandpa retired and moved the family to a nearby residential town, where they lived in a simple three-story house with a coal-burning stove and oven. The first time we came for Easter, sheets of delicious cakes were stacked on every stair step between the second and third floor. Platters filled with pieces of cake disappeared quickly at every meal.

No wonder, then, that I rejoiced when my Mother declared, "Nacki (my nickname), since you refuse to put a hook on the Gothic u and don't like spelling, you better stay here and let Grandpa teach you."

Grandpa could be strict and pulled my ear every time I forgot to put a dot on the i or a hook over the u. But what I really feared was "Anton," Grandpa's old whipping rod, which he had used to

discipline his school kids. Although rarely used, Anton's mere presence on top of the kitchen cabinet inspired respect. Resigned, I grudgingly learned my lessons but afterward ran to Grossmutti to hide in her apron.

"Don't worry," Grossmutti would say while she stroked my hair. "Grandpa means well. How about helping me in the kitchen?"

How I loved that, especially licking the pots when she had made a cake or pudding. We cleaned and cooked vegetables from the garden, which also had berry bushes, fruit trees, a shed with Grandpa's beehives, and a swing and bars for us children to play on.

In the winter, since the upstairs bedrooms were not heated, Grossmutti often asked, "Come help me put the hot-water bottles in your beds so they are warm when you climb in. First put them where your feet will be and in fifteen minutes, come back and move the bottle further up." And so we climbed up and down the stairs with the hot metal bottles until all beds were warm and cozy for bedtime.

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The end of inflation was also the end of Father's career. With his company's bankruptcy and his illness, his future tumbled like a house of cards. While returning by train from a trip to Paris, he fell violently ill. An ambulance took him to a hospital in Cologne. The doctors diagnosed meningitis for which, we were told, no cure existed. But luckily, Cologne had one of the few doctors who knew how to treat it. Mother rushed there, and as she opened the door to his room, said, "Well, Oscar, I hear you want to die," whereupon Oscar decided to live. But something within him had died. He had changed.

We had a few more years before our family life came to an end. The post - World War I years were hectic with scarcity of food and governments that changed constantly. One year, shortly before our summer vacation, a maid arrived unexpectedly in school to rush me home. The household was in an uproar, everyone shouting and running. Clothes were flung into trunks, and within an hour, my mother, my sisters, and I were on a train to Berchtesgaden. In case of a revolution we would be better off far from Berlin.

This trip introduced me to the beautiful German Alps. I loved the air, the flowering meadows, and the serene beauty of the lakes. Mother made it her challenge to climb the second highest mountain, the Watzman. Excited and burdened with knapsack, rope, and spikes, she went off on her adventure and returned beaming with pride.

In spite of all the beauty, our stay in Berchtesgaden was difficult for me. Our daily hikes were long, and I had a hard time keeping up with Mother and my sisters, who were four and six years older. They, however, had little patience with me. I felt left out and cried easily. When they tired of hearing me cry, they sang a rhyme, "The sun is shining, Nacki is whining, but we are filled with glee and happiness." That did not help me nor did my mother, who kept busy with her own work.

One evening a few weeks later, I learned the hard way not to feel sorry for myself. Shortly after we returned from Berchtesgaden, on the cook's day off, Mother prepared her usual scalloped potatoes for dinner. While we were all sitting around the kitchen table, my Father suddenly ordered, "Nacki, go upstairs and turn on the light to the third floor."

Oh no, I thought, and started to cry, for the maids had scared me with stories of the bogeyman hiding in the darkness. Suddenly all of them, Father, Mother, and my sisters, imitated my crying. Surprised, I covered my ears and stared at each of their grimacing faces while they howled and screamed. Did I really look like that? How awful! "Stop," I begged, "I promise not to cry again." And thus ended my short period of being a cry baby.

My childhood years would have been lonely had it not been for my girlfriend, Nati. With my mother always working, the maids busy, and my sisters older, it had been up to me to create my life. Nati was heaven sent. We became friends in the Badeanstalt, a long wooden building with booths for changing clothes, which stood partly on shore and partly in the lake on poles. In this relic of Victorian prudery where males and females swam from widely separated sides, we were taught to swim, like fish, on a line suspended from a kind of gallows.

Lazarus, Nati must have been a friend or even my twin in another life. We were so much alike and yet so different. We were both named Renate, we both loved nature, freedom, humor, and the same games. Later in life, we both married men named Alfred, we both had three children -- girl, boy, girl -- and even kept company by having breast cancer. Otherwise, our looks, families, and lifestyles were vastly different.

Even stranger, Nati was two years older, a big difference when you are only six years old and live on opposite sides of the town; our parents never met nor did we ever attend the same school.

Still, Nati and I were inseparable, although it meant a long walk or taking the bus to be together. Yes, our town now had three buses. We quickly named their drivers Fatty, Skinny, and Stupid. Fatty was friendly and let us ride for free, Skinny's mood could be unpredictable, and Stupid never smiled and we always had to pay.

Although not directly involved in the jealous fights between my sisters, I became enraged over the biting ridicule Brigitte heaped on Marianne. Brigitte's emotions were powerful and explosive. One day, after a fierce disagreement, she locked herself in Marianne's room screaming, "I'll show you what I think of you," and tore up the room, strewing the contents of the drawers on the floor and flinging the bedding and white sheets out of the third floor window down onto a smelly compost pile in the kitchen patio. Marianne took all the abuse quietly, as if feeling sorry for Brigitte.

While Marianne, involved in yoga exercises, quietly did her breathing exercises, Brigitte, who had just entered a dancing school, would jump and fly through the room, singing a nasty rhyme and teasing her mercilessly with, "You don't even move your body, how stupid can you be." When I cried out in anger at this unfair tirade, Marianne said smilingly, "Never mind. She does not understand." Even so, I loved both my sisters: I jumped with Brigitte, and later joined Marianne in her yoga class.

On looking back, it amazes me, Lazarus, that I can see so clearly how each of my sisters had her future all mapped out: how Brigitte, with her strong ego, would become a powerful actress and Marianne, just like Mother, would spend her life trying to help people by looking inside their souls.

Every era has its new ideas and fads. Around 1924, especially among psychoanalysts, the theory evolved that early child analysis would prevent suppression, and thus neurosis, in the adult. Mother, always interested in something new, sent her three daughters off to the Freudian couch of the later famous Melanie Klein.

As I lay on the hard, ominous couch, Melanie asked me to talk about my thoughts and dreams. Being a lively, healthy eight-year-old, I told of climbing trees and playing Indians. The therapist's long reply startled my innocent ears. All my thoughts, she said, had to do with penis envy and anus play. Although proud of having been told to make the long trip by bus and subway to her office alone, I soon found a way to get there ever so slowly. Arriving late, I would dive not onto but underneath the terrible couch, with my fingers pressed firmly in my ears.

Messy nightmares haunted my nights. Thus, on a rainy afternoon with nothing else to do, I suggested to Nati that we should write letters to people and drop them in their mailboxes. What fun I had writing all that I had learned on the couch and signing the letters, "Greetings from your Fart."

It did not take long for my letters to arrive back home, along with indignant complaints. How my parents must have laughed, but with Father's strictest face, he pronounced, "Nacki, you must go to every house where you dropped a letter and say, 'Excuse me, I am Fart. I accidentally dropped something here!'"

With tears of shame, I paced back and forth in front of the first door. I had promised, so I had to ring the bell. A maid opened it, I rambled my sentence and fled. At home, I pleaded, "Please, was not one house enough?" My parents burst out laughing. Hugging me, Mother proclaimed, "So much for child analysis!"

Mother, always a rebel against the establishment, was one of the first woman to cut off her long hair. Ours soon followed. Then she experimented with schools. My sisters had started in the normal public school, but I became the guinea pig for modern schooling. One school was wonderful. "Children," the teacher would say, "would you like to study or play Indians?" Indians, of course. What a foolish question.

Unfortunately, my childhood in our house and garden, my freedom in the parks, woods, and lake, and my time with Nati, all came to an abrupt end. Father's desperate quest for making a new fortune sounds like a tale of Don Quixote, a story of windmills and dreams that vanished in the clouds, as did the money. Thus, the day came when the house had to be sold and we moved to the city.