

Courage ~ Love ~ Faith



Jacob's Courage chronicles the dazzling beauty of passionate love and enduring bravery in a lurid world where the innocent are brutally murdered.

In 1939, seventeen-year-old Austrians Jacob Silverman and Rachael Goldberg are bright, talented, and deeply in love. Because they are Jews, their families lose everything; their jobs, possessions and money, contact with loved ones, and finally their liberty.

Follow them into a decrepit ghetto, from there to a prison camp where disease and starvation are rampant and finally to the terror of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they are forced to perform unspeakable acts of horror in order to remain alive.



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Weinblatt

JACOB'S COURAGE



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A Holocaust Love Story



A Novel By

Charles S. Weinblatt

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Cover Art by Lauren Weinblatt

This book is dedicated to my father, Dr. Morris Weinblatt, whose tender love, profound insight, and courageous actions inspire me long after his death.

This book is also dedicated to the 6,000,000 Jews who perished in the Holocaust. They have been lost, but will never be forgotten.

About the Author

Charles Weinblatt, a retired university administrator, is the author of published works of fiction and non-fiction.

Much of Weinblatt's maternal extended family perished in the Holocaust. Great grandparents, great aunts and uncles and many cousins disappeared into the void of Nazi annihilation. These included Rabbis, cantors, professors, and musicians. Family members who escaped from Europe now live in Argentina, Kenya, and the United States. The rest were never heard from again.

Portions of this novel were adapted from the memoirs of the author's mother, Clara Volk Weinblatt, a childhood victim of pogroms against her Russian Jewish village.

Weinblatt currently lives in Sylvania, Ohio with his wife, Fran. They have two grown children, Brian and Lauren.

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Jacob's Courage

Chapter 1

The Darkness Arrives

The dreary, dark winter of 1939-1940 began early in the Austrian Alps. Thick, gray snow clouds rushed through the dark forest, on their way to the frosty cliffs above. It was as though nature was preparing itself for the onslaught of terror soon to follow – freezing itself from the approaching evil. Here in the cold, dark Austrian mountains near Salzburg, the world slept peacefully. Yet, horror was on the horizon.

The Nazis arrived less than a year ago. They took control over Austria without a single shot and offered everyone a better future. That is, they promised a better future for everyone except Jews, and certain other “undesirables.” Had the Silverman family known what was about to happen, they would have run away as fast as their legs could carry them. But, no one could imagine the terror that awaited them. It was beyond reason and sanity. They were about to become engulfed by the darkest episode in the history of mankind.

Underneath beautiful Alpine peaks, Salzburg was a parade of Baroque motifs. Located between the mountains Kapuzinerberg and Mönchsberg, and the River Salzach, Salzburg had everything one might expect of an independent, modern Austrian city of the 1930s – small alleys, colorful homes, towering castles and palaces, gardens, churches and monasteries. Music helped to shape the culture of Salzburg, which was the birthplace of Mozart. It was heard everywhere: in churches, castles, palaces, and, of course, concert halls. The bustling “old town” section stretched along the banks of the river and was crowded with shops of all varieties. Towering above all this was the sturdy Hohensalzburg fortress. Salzburg has largely been known for its serene artistic and educational endeavors. But in 1939, peaceful Salzburg was on the brink of war.

For the few Jewish citizens of the city, 1939 marked the beginning of the end. Despite countless warning signs and numerous begging relatives, the Silverman family stayed in Europe when they should have left. Dr. Moshe Silverman silently observed these warning signs, allowing too much time to pass before making a decision. He had a chance to leave Europe, as did many of his friends and acquaintances. He could have saved his wife Hanna and their precious child, Jacob. But, like so many others, he assumed that the Nazi threat was only temporary. It would soon pass, he thought. This decision would haunt Moshe Silverman until his death.

Jacob and his parents lived in a modest apartment that was very well furnished. In most respects, they were a typical upper middle-class Austrian family. Moshe was a well-respected physician. His wife, Hanna, volunteered with the community food bank, the public school and the one small synagogue. Their son, Jacob, was a typical bright teenager. In his last year of secondary school, Jacob was planning for a career in medicine, like his father. He was deeply in

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love with beautiful Rachael Goldberg, whose father was also a physician in Salzburg. They attended the same school, sometimes in the same classes. Like their friends, they were busy planning for their careers – their university life. Like all adolescents, they explored their passions, desires and dreams. And, despite Nazi party threats against Jews living in Austria, Jacob and Rachael assumed that these wonderful days would continue, if not blossom into something even more magnificent. Despite the warning signs, life was superb.

Of course, Jacob and Rachael were not oblivious to the threats made upon Jews by Nazis. They heard propaganda speeches by Hitler and other Nazi leaders that blamed all of the problems of the world on Jews. They understood that Hitler had a vision for “Aryan” people, who were “destined to rule the world.” They even understood that Hitler needed to create a scapegoat that would help drive the people to achieve his concept of world domination.

Hitler used propaganda to showcase Jewish wealth against the backdrop of Christian Germans who had suffered so badly after World War I. Jacob understood how this propaganda created an angry backlash against Jews. He knew that Jews had been ostracized and hated throughout Europe for generations. Many European citizens were eager to follow the Nazi lead against Jews. The rest would not consider fighting Nazi policy dictates. With no army to defend them against attack, European Jews represented the perfect scapegoat for Hitler’s plans to succeed. In this effort, he was entirely successful. But Jacob had no idea how far the government would go to eliminate Jews.

Government policy soon forbade Jews from owning property. By 1938, Jewish doctors could no longer practice medicine in German hospitals. They could only serve other Jews. Jewish lawyers were forbidden from practicing law. Jewish professors were fired from university positions. Then, through forced relocation, Jews were moved into very small undesirable parts of each city. These “ghettos” were filthy, had no running water, no electricity and no city services. Dozens of Jews were forced to live in the space formerly occupied by one family. The severely cramped spaces were unbearable. Professionals and successful artisans or business owners were astonished at such repulsive living conditions. Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing and were soon barred from cafes, cinema, theaters and other public places. They could shop only after the stores had served gentiles, when the aisles were empty. Jews could no longer ride buses and were forced to stand in the back of trains. German soldiers around the ghetto maintained a strict curfew. Through openly hostile propaganda, Jews became an enemy of the government and the people.

Jacob had heard his father rationalize for years that Jew-hating would be less severe in Austria than it was in Germany. He said that the Austrian government would never allow Jews to be persecuted in such a manner. Then, in 1938, with less than a whimper, Austrian leaders allowed the German army to assume governmental and logistical control, in what was called the *Auschluss*. The Jew-hating propaganda that dominated German social consciousness spread like wildfire throughout Austria. Jacob was surprised at how quickly and easily it happened. Even so-called cultured Austrians now regarded Jews with suspicion. Myths and negative stereotypes about Jews rose to the surface.

The Darkness Arrives

In the autumn of 1939, the new German war in Poland was still a distant rumble, almost unheard in Austria. Families from all of Europe continued to vacation in Vienna, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Linz – as they had done for generations. The sights and sounds of the front were a remote drumbeat, or a two-minute newsreel at the cinema. Nazis brought economic reforms leading to a welcome recovery that Austrians enjoyed. For many Austrians, life was better than it had been for more than a decade.

There were only a few hundred Jews in Salzburg at this time and they tended to remain within their own tight-knit group and neighborhood. The Nazi propaganda machine was always at work against Jews. In every media format, ranting government leaders projected the “dangerous Jewish menace,” from the Nazi perspective. In Salzburg, it resulted in the occasional public beating of Jews, the desecration of the only synagogue and the destruction of Jewish-owned storefronts. But, in 1939, most Austrians felt at peace. Many believed that their lives were improving under the Nazi government. At best, they were indifferent to the plight of their Jewish neighbors. At worst, they plotted against them.

By the spring of 1939, apathy turned into public hatred, leading to violence. By the fall of 1938, Jacob and his Jewish friends had become public targets of hatred and violence. Most of the Christian children of Salzburg went to a new summer camp run by Nazi propagandists. They returned to their homes changed. Suddenly, these Brown-shirted youths began to routinely berate and beat Jewish children on the city streets. Synagogues throughout Germany and Austria were now burned, rather than defaced. Jewish-owned stores were vandalized and torched more frequently. It seemed that almost overnight the children of Austria had learned how to hate Jews. They did so at home, in school and through government-sponsored organizations and clubs. The public had easily become accustomed to it. Hardly a protest was heard. Deprived of work, homes, bank accounts and permission to travel, the Jews of Salzburg were on a fast track to destruction.

Jacob, who rarely heard his parents argue, suddenly found them in heated discussions about leaving Austria. On almost a daily basis, his mother asked if Moshe had found immigration visas for a safe country. Jacob’s father would shake his head and change the topic of discussion. At first, like his father, Jacob dismissed the threat. He knew that his mother was high-strung. She had a propensity for anxiety and depression. But, many of his friends had already left with their parents. The Jewish population of Salzburg was indeed shrinking. And, well-known Jews, such as Albert Einstein, had made no secret of why they abandoned Europe. Were those families jumping the gun? Did they really need to leave? Would not the current danger pass one day soon? Moshe seemed to think that the Nazis would eventually give up on Jew-hating. But, Jacob had become increasingly troubled about gaining admittance to a university of his choice.

By late 1939, Jews who attempted to flee found freedom elusive. Almost no other country would take them in. Immigration laws in most free countries at the time involved the use of quotas. Many Jews who escaped before the beginning of the Nazi takeover had obtained foreign visas. However, once a country’s quota for Jews had been filled, the doors were closed. Many Jews who thought

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that they had managed to escape the iron fist of Nazi control were eventually sent back to Europe, to endure persecution and death in concentration camps. Eventually, the majority of Europe's Jewish population became stranded in their home countries. Then, Nazis systematically deported Jews to internment and death camps. Sadly, Western countries refused to alter immigration quotas for Jews, even when evidence of German death camps had become well-known. Millions of innocent men, women and children were doomed to an untimely death at the hands of Nazis. Why the Allies didn't save them, Jacob would never know.

For the Jews of Salzburg, the world had radically changed. Only a fortunate few had managed to escape to other countries. Those who remained were about to become victims of the most despicable crime in the history of mankind. They were swept into the horrors of the Holocaust.

Chapter 2

Jacob's Nightmare

In the third floor bedroom of a tightly grouped set of gray apartment buildings, seventeen year-old Jacob Silverman tossed and turned in his bed. A fierce winter storm had dumped new snow on the city overnight. In the forest below, the wind slowly began to abate. Evergreen trees were bending with the stress of the ice and snow. They began to creak and moan with each gust of wind. Smoke drifted up from chimneys in the city above, surrounded by a sentinel of towering gray mountains. The heavy snow drifted into huge rounded white cliffs, hanging across rooftops and piling against the sides of buildings. Slowly, one-by-one, pale yellow lights emerged inside homes. Salzburg was awakening. Early risers pushed the snow from streets and walkways with brooms and shovels. Engulfing this scene was complete and breathtaking silence. Not even a birdcall could be heard. In Salzburg, the world was asleep and at peace in its windswept isolation. The forest below the mountains was a soft and quiet world.

Sweating profusely, Jacob's sleep was disturbed by a horrible vision. He was oblivious to the scratching of a tree branch against his window. Under closed lids, his eyes darted quickly in every direction. Young Jacob was experiencing the worst nightmare of his life.

In this horrific nightmare, Jacob was older by several years. He was also extremely thin. More than that, he was emaciated. Jacob wore a strange costume. It looked like gray pajamas with vertical red stripes. A Star of David was emblazoned upon the front. On his head was a cap of the same coarse fabric. He looked around the huge red brick walled room, filled with acrid smoke and ash. It was some sort of furnace room. The heat was unbearable. And there was a disgusting odor. It smelled like burned meat – but not exactly. The stench was sickly-sweet.

Jacob stood in front of an enormous blazing oven. Mechanical trays were built in front of openings into the fire. Men dressed like Jacob were continuously pushing similar large objects into the fire on the mechanical trays. Other men scrambled to bring more of the large things into the room for the fire. The fire itself was so large and intense that it produced a deep thundering sound. It shook the foundations of the room and the entire building. Jacob thought that it sounded like a speeding locomotive. He was sweating profusely and lightheaded. He was also overwhelmed with exhaustion and his muscles ached fiercely. But how could he feel such pain when it was only a dream? Thoughts were spinning around in his confused mind. *This dream is more real than life itself.* Ash filled the room everywhere. He choked on it. The ash was in his nose, his throat and upon his

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clothes. In his eyes, it reduced his visual acuity. The ubiquitous ash floated constantly through the air, like tiny white snowflakes. He soon found it difficult to breathe.

Looking around the room slowly, Jacob saw three other openings into the huge fire on his side. He assumed that there were additional openings on the other side. This was by far the largest furnace that he had ever seen. The heat coming from the gargantuan fire was sweltering. Jacob had never been in a place like this in his life. *How did I get here? What is it all about? What are these people burning?* He was surrounded by red brick walls; with large gray stains above the various openings where men were busy feeding the fire. *Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing?* He was holding onto a large gray iron platform, built like a huge heavy tray with rollers to slide the large objects into the blazing inferno. Men dressed like Jacob continued to push things into the fire on the large trays. But, his vision was blurred by ashes. He could barely see at all. *What are those things going into the fire?*

Above the room, through cracks in the wooden floor, Jacob could see a towering chimney, belching thick clouds of ash and gray smoke. The fire was so intense that it erupted above the chimney. Like a monstrous flame atop a gigantic brick candle, the chimney pushed out prolific smoke. There was so much smoke above the building that Jacob could not tell if it was night or day. People scurried around the room. Each man seemed to have his own distinct duty in this strange factory. Their faces were coated with ash, giving them the appearance of white-faced actors in a sickening play. It was hard for Jacob to breathe without inhaling more of the ever-present ash. He was getting dizzy. *Where the hell am I?*

Jacob stared at the men next to him, who pushed those prodigious things into the giant fire as fast as they could. They pushed the heavy things into the inferno and then pulled the trays back, empty. These men never looked up, continuously feeding the fires. Jacob felt completely alive. His heart was pounding. *Am I dreaming? If so, no other dream felt so much like reality!* The images and sounds were altogether too real for a dream. Jacob held onto his own large empty tray, trying to catch his breath. Looking at his left arm, he noticed numbers tattooed in dark blue. *Why would I have numbers on my arm?*

Around him, the bustling work went on. The costumed men pushed and pulled upon the huge bins, continuously delivering the large items into the fire. These men were also emaciated. But, what were those items going into the fire? They reminded Jacob of life-sized dolls of naked people. *Of course, that's impossible.* His vision remained blurry, no matter how many times he wiped his eyes. He could taste the acrid ash in his mouth. Jacob felt certain that he was about to pass out.

All the while, fierce looking black uniformed men with helmets and machine guns were shouting at the workers in German. The dark-uniformed soldiers had the letters "SS" upon their collars. For some unknown reason, Jacob thought that the soldiers were named "Waffen." Just below the thunderous sound of the fire, there were other sounds. Doors were opening and closing. Carts were crashing together. A large elevator screeched as it moved up and down, and workers carried carts with squealing wheels. But the tremendous deep roar of

Jacob's Nightmare

the furnace was overwhelming. It was deafening.

Jacob wondered why people were yelling at him in German. Everyone he knew spoke Yiddish. Why would German soldiers be screaming at him? One soldier was irate at Jacob and walking in his direction. Jacob could not imagine why he was in this hellish place. In fact, Jacob had never been so confused in his life. But he increasingly began to realize that he was in trouble. This horribly realistic dream was exploding upon Jacob's mind and he had no idea how to deal with it.

Jacob's eyes continued to dart around the room. He tried to focus on the things that were being carried into the room. The "items" being burned were white and gray lumps of something, he thought. He rubbed his eyes again and again. Then, as his vision finally cleared, he was able to gaze into the furnace directly in front of him. Inside the blazing inferno, Jacob saw... bodies! The reality of this horrendous concept burst upon his fragile mind. Jacob realized with sudden horror, that the fire was filled with burning people! *The Germans are burning people!* Jacob felt suddenly nauseous and he began to retch. He doubled over as his stomach cramped. But there was no food to come up. He was emaciated. Instead, a long thin, silver stream of mucous dripped from his gaping mouth, falling lazily to the dusty, ash-covered floor. But nothing else came out. Jacob felt certain that he had been starved for quite some time.

As he focused on the bodies in the fire, Jacob saw that the victims were females of every age. Girls and women – all consumed in flames! *What horror!* Then, suddenly, two workers dumped a cart filled with more women and girls in front of Jacob's tray. He watched in awe as the two men began loading the victims onto the platform in front of Jacob. All of the victims were naked, and it appeared that they were already dead. Their heads had been shaved. Some had a number tattooed on their left breast or arm. With no hair, they looked like large, puffy dolls. Their bodies bounced and wiggled as they were picked up and placed on the trays. Some were soiled with feces and urine. Many had froth or blood coming from their mouths and nostrils. But none of them had bullet holes. Something else had killed them. Jacob's mind was bending under the weight of this terror. *What manner of hell is this?*

The faces of the dead appeared expressionless to Jacob; their eyes sunken and distant. They stared at him as though waiting for an explanation. If they could speak, he was certain that they would ask why he was about to burn them. Many of the bodies were purple on the bottom and white on top. Some had tanned faces below white skulls, where their hair had been shaved. Jacob's mind stretched hard to comprehend this inconceivable panorama. It was too real to be a dream. And it was too frightening to be reality. *Perhaps it is a hallucination.* He closed his eyes tightly and shook his head. All the while, the screaming German soldier was walking Jacob's way with hostility in mind. He repeated to himself, "*This can't be real. This can't be real. This can't be real. This can't be real...*" He then opened his eyes, but with the same dreadful result. The vile furnace room remained. And the German soldier who was screaming at Jacob was getting closer.

Jacob trembled as he watched the constant motion of the room. Bodies

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were continually brought into the room. A large dump truck now appeared at one doorway. Men dressed like Jacob dragged bodies from it. They were again all women and girls without hair, except for their pubic hair. The bodies that came from inside the building arrived in large gray steel bins on wobbly wheels that squeaked as they moved against the red brick floor. There were six to eight bodies per bin. As the bins were brought near front of the large trays, men picked up the bodies, placed them upon the tray and then shoved them into the thundering fire.

The men who were dressed like Jacob carried the bodies over their shoulders, on their backs – as though they were carrying huge sacks of grain. The children and babies were carried by an arm or a leg. Jacob was repulsed as he watched the men throw the tiny bodies into stacks or upon the trays. He watched this horrific scene unfold in utter amazement. Jacob had never seen people sling babies and small children around and throwing them into stacks, like human toys. He understood that the babies were dead. Yet, it seemed so unnatural and disrespectful to throw bodies around carelessly. Jacob's mind was now bending toward insanity. The things he saw in this room were virtually... unthinkable. *Even Nazis could not stoop so low!*

Most of the workers here were strong young men, although there were a few older men in the same striped "uniform." He watched their faces as they scurried about the room performing their various functions. *Their faces are like stone!* They worked furiously, as though their masters' whips were at their backs. Jacob felt sickened as he watched them pick up babies and very small children by a leg or an arm, flinging the tiny bodies around as they would a rag doll. *Their eyes are so cold and distant!* He imagined that each of them had shut out the mindless horror of the task that they were assigned.

The room was a symphony of motion. Bodies came in from two different locations. Some workers brought them in. Other workers stacked the bodies in front of the oven openings. The two workers that had just brought bodies to Jacob's furnace opening walked away. These bodies were apparently "for Jacob." On top of the pile, he saw an old woman, a middle-aged woman and a girl. The woman and child appeared malnourished. The old woman had deep circles under her eyes and bruise marks all around her body. The girl appeared to be seven or eight years old. Perhaps it was a woman with her daughter and grandchild. Their facial features were similar. They each had smears of blood around their nostrils and mouths. Otherwise, they seemed peaceful, as though they were asleep. But their eyes were wide open. Their eyes seemed to plead with Jacob for help. But it was too late for help.

Who were these people, thought Jacob? What did they do to deserve this? What right did the Nazis have to arbitrarily kill innocent people, particularly women and children? At this instant, Jacob began to wonder if these victims were all Jewish. He knew that his fellow workers were Jewish. Each had a Star of David emblazoned upon the left front of their "pajamas." *Are the victims also Jewish? Was Hitler really destroying the Jewish presence in Europe? It is not just an idle threat?* Jacob had always understood that Hitler needed to make Jews a scapegoat. He needed someone to blame for the lost war and hopeless

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economy. But Jacob's father had told him these were only threats.

In his dream, Jacob felt as though he had been there for many months. In a strange and obscene way, he had come to feel that he was emotionally attached to this part of the furnace. Although the inside of the furnace was one large container, the opening on the far left side was "Jacob's." He had come to feel that it was actually an extension of him, assigned by God. It had become his own instrument of destruction for the Germans. *But, why am I cooperating with the Nazis?*

Somehow, Jacob felt that he controlled the portion of the huge fire inside his doorway. *Yes, this is my fire. I control the pathway, leading thousands of people to oblivion.* Jacob had come to believe that he, in some ritualistic way, ruled this pathway. As the bodies were brought to him, he directed them into the inferno for their final destruction. To Jacob, this was an overwhelmingly powerful responsibility. It seemed to him the most responsible job that he had ever had. But why was he selected to send so many of his people to the end of their existence? It seemed difficult for Jacob to differentiate his task from himself. In a sense, it became *him*. He felt both guilty for helping the Nazis and glad to still be alive. Yet, those feelings were mutually exclusive. *What right do I have to live, when so many innocent Jews died here?* The feeling of guilt was ghastly – beyond description. The pain of it was like a splinter inside his brain. He was captivated by the pain. It was leading him beyond the limits of sanity.

As his broken mind continued to disintegrate, Jacob called to the dead people who arrived at his fire by the thousands. *Come one, come all. Come men, women and children, come doctors, come lawyers, come students, come policemen, come nurses, come tailors, come carpenters, come Rabbis, come butchers, come teenagers, and come grandparents. I am Jacob, and I must turn you into ashes.*

Had Jacob come to view his job with *pride*? Yes, he did the Nazi's job well. But how could anyone be proud of burning innocent people? The torment was crushing his fragile mind. Oh, the depths of distress that awaited Jacob for doing his job well. But he soon came to realize that his distress did not arise from doing his job well, but from living. *Why am I allowed to live?* Guilt now motivated Jacob powerfully. His life had been reduced to the most pathetic existence possible, in which he fed fires of vengeance against his own people. Jacob was allowed to stay alive as long as there were more Jews to cremate. He could feel his mind splitting, cracking down the middle. His anguish was insurmountable. Finally, Jacob screamed at the ceiling. *"Why me, God?"* There was no reply.

The man next to Jacob was loading bodies onto his tray and pushing them into the fire as fast as he could. As he was doing this, he was softly saying *Kaddish*, a prayer for the dead, in Hebrew. Jacob's heart pounded so hard, he was afraid it would burst through his chest at any moment. Thoughts bounced swiftly through his mind. *No matter what people think about Jews, how could anyone mastermind something as horrible as this? And even if Hitler was mad, how could he convince his soldiers to do something so evil? Certainly, no sane person would do something this hideous, no matter what they believe from German propaganda.* Yet, the Germans were supervising this hideous task. Jacob

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noticed that all of the German soldiers had the "SS" insignia on their uniform. *Only monsters could do such a terrible thing to other people. The SS must consist of the most barbarous of all of the German soldiers.* And yet, there were some prisoners, like Jacob, who were bosses. Their name was *Kapo*. They did the dirty work for the German soldiers, who he thought were called *Waffen*. *How can Jews do such things to other Jews? How can I even know such terrible things?*

Jacob then realized why he performed this appalling function for the Nazis. He did it to survive. But was it worth it? *Who wants to live with the knowledge that he destroyed thousands of innocent people – including children? Certainly death would be better than this!* But underneath his torment, Jacob understood that his own death would soon arrive. The Germans changed the crematoria crew every month or two. Those from the old crew would be killed. The new crematoria crew then burned the bodies of the old crew. And that is how the system works, month after month, year after year – until there are no more bodies left to burn – until there are no more Jews left to kill. His shift was long overdue. He knew that when the next train arrived with men physically suitable to the task, his group would be killed and someone just like him would burn their bodies.

Jacob recalled the words that were on the gate above the entrance to this ignominious death camp. The wrought-iron letters spelled out "*Arbeit Macht Frei*," which means "Work Makes You Free." *How ironic*, thought Jacob. The "freedom" promised to them was their own death. *How can anyone do these things?* Just the thought of touching a corpse was sickening to Jacob. How can these men carry them around and dump them in piles? These are human beings! Some of them could have been their own family! *How can they put them into the fire?* Then, a terrible thought passed through Jacob's mind. It was the most painful thought that he had ever had. *What if I have to burn the bodies of Rachael or my parents?* His mind was now spinning out of control. Trembling, he was overcome by a wave of nausea.

Suddenly, Jacob was pushed very hard from behind. As he fell towards the open furnace, his face was singed. His head passed dangerously close to the flames. He could hear the hissing sound of his burning hair. The entire right side of his face was scorched. He stretched out his right arm and just barely grasped the tray before falling into the furnace. A wave of pain passed through his body. He fell on the ground, hitting the hot brick floor awkwardly, sending a cloud of ash up and around him and a stinging pain into his hip. He began coughing, as his nostrils filled with ashes. The right side of his face tingled and hurt simultaneously where it had been burned.

Jacob sat upon the brick floor and watched as the ash displaced from his fall made slow circles, floating in waves around the room. Bits of ash landed everywhere, on the uniforms of the soldiers, on the faces of workers, on the tray next to him, even on the bodies as they were carried into the room. It reminded Jacob of snowflakes falling gently on a windless day.

With astonishment, Jacob realized that he was inhaling all that remained from hundreds of Jews, perhaps thousands! Those tiny bits of ash were the remaining molecules of all of those innocent people, burned by these *kapos*. The

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realization was like a punch in his stomach and it made him sick. He began to retch again. Nothing happened. He retched over and over again as the comprehension of this insane reality was physically overpowering. *"This can't be happening... This can't be happening... This can't be happening."* Jacob repeated this sentence softly to himself while he moved up to rest on his knees. His hands and legs trembled.

Workers dressed like Jacob stared at him as they continued their frantic pace. Jacob became obsessed with the ash. It was on their uniforms, their faces, and their hands. Random, useless thoughts emerged. *The ashes must be buried by a Rabbi.* To Jacob, the men looked like frightened ghosts in some lurid story. Their faces held no expression save fear; no remorse, no anger, no frustration... nothing but constant, grueling fear. They moved like panicky machines from place to place, turning former friends and relatives into tiny bits of white ash. It was a scene from the worst possible nightmare. But it was Jacob's nightmare and it seemed more real than life.

The German soldier that had been screaming at Jacob finally arrived. He looked like any other German soldier. In his late 20s, he was tall, with blonde hair tucked neatly into his helmet. His blue eyes glared at Jacob, burning into him. He looked quite formidable, with his black helmet, black uniform, flashing SS pins, machine gun and neatly holstered Luger pistol. As he watched, Jacob could not hear the words of the German soldier. In fact, he could hear nothing except the thundering fire. He had been temporarily made deaf from his encounter with the furnace door. It was then that the tall, young soldier suddenly stopped screaming and slowly removed the Luger from its holster.

The German soldier drew his gun and moved toward Jacob, staring at him with indignant admonition. Then, the look on the Nazi's face suddenly changed from anger to one of decision. Jacob was reasonably certain that the soldier had decided to "fire" him from his job of shoveling dead people into the immense furnace. That thought made Jacob smile, as he assumed that he would be "transferred" to a different job in the camp.

However, Jacob's smile was not well received by the soldier. He screamed at Jacob in indignant German. Jacob noticed in an offhand manner that his accent had a touch of Bavarian. "What is it with you Jews?" scowled the tall young man with piercing blue eyes. "Do you think you're here for a vacation?" With that, the soldier pointed the shiny black gun at Jacob's head. Jacob trembled; as he realized that being "fired" could also have more permanent consequences. He was about to be shot for dereliction of duty. His heart pounded heavily in his chest. A shock ran up and down his spine. The hairs on the back of his neck pointed up. His breath came rapidly, in short gasping sounds.

Jacob realized with sudden dread that this would be his last moment alive. He felt blood rushing through his head. Perspiration formed tiny droplets on the back of his hands. He was lightheaded and nauseous. Jacob looked around at the other kapos, who continued working while staring at him. In tattered clothing and covered with human ashes, they walked to and fro with sad expressions. Most were young men, like Jacob. They stared at him in solemn, heartrending silence. Behind Jacob, the immense red brick furnace continued to roar. *This*

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isn't real! This isn't real! This isn't real!

The SS soldier slowly cocked the weapon, and aimed the gun directly at Jacob's temple. Everything seemed to suddenly slow down. The kapos staring at him moved more slowly. Jacob's eyes darted around the smoky room. With the steady movement of someone who had done this many times, the German backed himself away as far as possible. He did this to avoid getting blood on his handsome black uniform. Jacob watched in terror as the soldier's finger slowly squeezed the trigger backwards. *You won't die because this is just a dream! Isn't it just a dream?*

Suddenly the gun fired. Jacob was deafened by the roaring sound, even through the din of the furnace. A swath of flame and smoke left the gun's barrel. Jacob felt a huge jolt of pain in his head. Then, he was lost in darkness. The sounds of the world were gone. He could feel, hear or see nothing. Velvety darkness gradually encased him in a black vacuum from which nothing could emerge. Jacob became... nothing... within impenetrable darkness. *Oh my God in Heaven... I'm dead!*

Suddenly, in the empty darkness, Jacob heard a voice. At first it was so faint that he could barely hear it at all. Slowly, the voice drew closer to Jacob. He trembled in the cold, dark, terrible obscurity. *It is a voice! It is a woman's voice! Could an angel be calling my name?* Yes, someone was definitely calling to him! Suddenly, he recognized the voice. It was his mother! She was demanding something from him. But, he could not hear her words. *What is she saying? Is my mother dead too?* No! She was telling him to get up. His ears were still ringing from the gunshot. *Where is she? I can't see her!* Jacob struggled to find his mother in the darkness. *I must save Mother!* Jacob understood that he had to save her from this horrible fate. He struggled mightily, but he could not move.

Time passed. He tried to move again, this time with some success. His legs moved. He pushed as hard as he could in an effort to stand up. Soon, he could move his arms. He pushed and then pushed again. This time, he was able to sit upright. He opened his eyes and this time there was light!

Jacob Silverman awoke with a shudder, covered in sweat and sitting upright in his bed. His heart was pounding and his chest hurt. Jacob was trembling uncontrollably. Sick to his stomach, he retched twice. But, Jacob managed to avoid vomiting. He heard his mother calling to him.

"Jacob, it's time to wake up," she screamed. "Come on now! Get out of bed. Breakfast is almost ready!"

Jacob sat up in his bed, breathless, perspiring and trembling. He thought about how his parents had been fighting over whether or not they should leave Austria. Suddenly, the idea seemed to possess incrementally more merit. It was a moment of epiphany. Jacob was still overcome by the reality of his nightmare. It seemed as real as waking life itself. Something deep inside told Jacob that his life was about to change in a significant way. He understood that changes were in motion that could never be altered. He felt as though some strange destiny was calling to him. But, he had no idea what he was supposed to do. Therefore, he did what any adolescent would do. He put it out of his mind, preferring to think of more esthetically enjoyable aspects of life.

Chapter 3

The Nightmare Begins

Peeking through the curtains of his bedroom window, Jacob saw that a heavy snow had arrived overnight, drifting and altering the beautiful landscape outside his window. He loved this mountain city. It had always been his home. Jacob estimated that at least eight inches of new snow blanketed the city. He could barely see the tops of the bushes in front of the library across the street. Only the light-blue domes and spires of the Old City were visible against the vast whiteness of the mountains. Jacob loved to look out at new snow cover. It gave him the impression that the dirt of the world had somehow been replaced by this wonderful, pure covering.

Since it was Saturday, Jacob prepared to go to synagogue with his parents. He wondered if many people would be there, considering the heavy new snow. Gazing at the white-capped mountains surrounding his city, Jacob wondered why anyone would ever want to leave it. He lived in the part of town known as the “Jewish Section.” It was simply the place where all of his family and friends lived. He felt no better or worse for living there. And, although his family was financially comfortable, Jacob’s parents had shown him what poverty was like at an early age. Each year, just before Christmas, Jacob and his parents volunteered to serve food to the homeless at a local soup kitchen. They also took cooked meals to poor farming families just outside of town. Jacob felt sorry for the poor families of Salzburg. He realized how fortunate he was that his father earned a good income. And, he realized how sad it would feel to be poor.

But, what made Salzburg a paradise to Jacob right now was that it contained a certain Miss Rachael Goldberg. For the past two years, he had fallen deeply in love with her. While he considered the possibility that people his age often lust after girls, more so than love them, Jacob was not at all confused. They had been together almost constantly for the past year. Recently, they had begun kissing. Jacob could see love in her eyes too. Those tender, large brown eyes pulled at Jacob as gravity pulled upon him. Some grand chemical explosion had taken place within his brain and Jacob was madly, passionately, intensely in love. He never imagined that another human being could so completely capture his heart and his head. It felt frightening and wonderful. Jacob Silverman was incredibly happy. The world was theirs for the taking.

Jacob sat in the living room with his father, waiting for his mother so that they could leave for the synagogue. It seemed that they always were waiting for his mother when they went somewhere. Jacob hated being late for anything. However, it allowed time for Jacob and his father to have a long and important conversation. The radio was on. It was broadcasting another Nazi speech cursing Jews as the cause of world war. Jacob wondered if people really believed this nonsense.

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Jacob and his father gazed down in anxious silence as the radio announcer droned on and on in his deep, metallic voice. "Germany is united in stamping out the Jewish vermin who daily poison our lives with their greed and deceitfulness. For too many generations the good Aryan people have allowed the Jewish traitors to live amongst us. But we will no longer tolerate their social and political treachery. Jews are the greatest evil in Europe. They have plans, along with their communist brethren, to take over the world. Every good citizen of Europe should point out the Jew and make him pay for what he has done to us. See who has the money that starving Aryans deserve. Yes, while the good, hard-working Aryan people of Europe starve, the Jews live in luxury. They have moved into our cities and towns and stolen our money. Greed and deceit is their way. Yes, Jews everywhere plot to control the good Aryan people. They plot against us in their min-yans." Jacob and his father looked at each other with matching horrified stares.

The announcer continued, unabated. "But, your government has taken bold action to eliminate the Jewish danger. As I speak today, labor camps are being built to house the Jewish menace. They must wear their Star of David everywhere, so that we may protect our children from their evil influence. We know it to be true that Jews carry lice and spread disease among us. They are truly vermin. The Jew serves the devil himself. Therefore, we must punish the Jew. We must move them away from our dear Aryan children, lest they poison our precious offspring with their mindless treachery. Jews are parasites. They are the lowest form of life. As such, they do not deserve to live amongst us. We will never surrender in our glorious fight to punish the evil Jew." Moshe finally had enough. He stood up, walked over to the radio and turned it off. Jacob noted with sadness how his father's posture was now slumped, where it was once upright. His father wore an expression of sorrow.

With each speech, Jews had become less safe in Salzburg. During the past few months there had been an increase in crime against Jews. Jewish-owned storefronts were smashed. Stores were burned. The municipal firemen made little effort to rescue a burning Jewish structure. Jewish physicians found fewer and fewer gentile patients in their waiting rooms. Customers disappeared at all types of Jewish stores. Accountants and lawyers found themselves serving no one. After every propaganda meeting, more Jews became targets. Life was changing very fast now. And, while Jacob had complete trust in his father, he began to wonder if it was too late to escape. For the first time in his life, Jacob was truly frightened.

"Father," Jacob said softly, "Are we really leaving Austria? Have you found passage for us to another country?" Jacob knew that his mother had been badgering his father to find a safe place for them to live for years. She had been experiencing her "premonitions" again. Jacob recalled listening to his mother's premonitions as a child. She told his father that something very bad was coming and that the entire family should leave. She tried to persuade her sisters, who lived in Poland. Every few days Hanna would lecture Moshe about the need to escape. Jacob suddenly realized that his mother could be right. Moshe fought against Hanna's desire to emigrate. Like Jacob, Moshe found Salzburg a beautiful place to live. Moshe had begun the process of seeking political asylum only

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recently. Was it now too late?

Moshe looked briefly at Jacob and then looked down at the floor. He seemed preoccupied. “No, Jacob. I haven’t found anything yet. I’ve tried at least a dozen embassies. It seems like no other country will admit Jews at this time. Their quotas are filled for this year and next year – or so they say. Some people say that Jews are safe in Hungary. I will try them again next.”

Anti-Semitism now permeated the soft and silent city of Salzburg. Of course, it had been with some families for many generations. But, now it appeared in schools, hospitals and even in churches. The town population, which had already viewed Jews with suspicion, now avoided them altogether. Many townspeople believed that Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. They spoke of Jews as being “clannish” and considered the Jews’ spoken language, a corrupted form of German called Yiddish, with disdain. Many people suggested that all Jews were wealthy, regardless of their appearance or standard of living. They appeared “strange” to the gentile population of Salzburg. While it had not prevented commerce between the two groups, these differences had always seemed to be just under the surface of conversation. But the influence of overt prejudice now poisoned the entire community. It was growing stronger day by day, fed by German propaganda. Hitler had made everyone afraid of Jews. He was divisive, with an unrelenting purpose. He drove his wicked policies into smaller and smaller communities, until everyone felt that they had to appear against the Jews. Meanwhile, he drove the Jews out of their comfortable homes and into deplorable ghettos. He stole their bank accounts and businesses. He confiscated their art, jewelry and valuable heirlooms. Deportation of Jews to labor and death camps in the East was a constant threat. Many Nazis absconded with Jewish property for themselves.

As he sat with his father and listened to the Nazi diatribe on the radio, Jacob sank into despair. His thoughts drifted back in time to his first real punishment at the hands of Nazi youth.

He was fifteen years old, walking home from school with his friends, Isaac and Saul. They were younger; ten and twelve. But, since they lived in the same apartment building, Jacob always walked home from school with them. The ten-block trip was typically boring, accompanied by broken conversation and on some days, extreme cold. The three boys exchanged small talk and pleasantries, although none of them considered each other close friends. Then, one day, the brown shirts arrived. Everything changed after that. Just thinking about it made Jacob shiver.

The words emanating from the radio passed by Jacob’s ear as a distant chattering, while his mind traveled back in time. He and his two younger friends were at the corner of Kautzlgasse and Altgasse, walking home from school. It was late November, almost Hanukkah, and Jacob’s breath streamed out in front of him as he walked. *It was so cold that day. It was the coldest day of the fall.* There was almost a kilometer between school and home. This day, the frigid wind whipped up snow and deposited it against the windward side of every building. On a day like this, walking with the wind at your back was a blessing. Walking directly into such a frigid wind could turn one’s face into a tangle of

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stinging skin. If your breath came out and then went sideways, that meant a partial stinging from the wind. But, if your breath streamed out in front of you, then the wind was gratefully upon your back, and at least for one day, your face would not take a beating.

November 29, 1938, was like that. Jacob recalled the bitter wind. Neither he, nor his traveling companions spoke of it, although it had to be on their minds. They had only one thing to fear, other than the cold wind, while walking home from school – the “brown shirts.” The brown shirts were a group of fearsome gentile boys who were bent upon hurting Jews. They seemed to model themselves upon the black-uniformed *Waffen SS* soldiers, who had spread chaos and death upon Jews and other “undesirables.” They often whipped themselves into a fury at the town meeting hall. After that, they went “hunting” for Jewish kids. Many of Jacob’s friends had been beaten badly by those evil kids. Jacob recalled that they were more than halfway home with no one in sight. He believed that the danger was gone that blustery day. It must have been too cold for hunting, or so he thought. Unfortunately, he was wrong.

Jacob stopped at the southeast corner. Behind them leafless trees bent with the wind, like giant gray skeletons resisting the relentless push of nature. To the front, the boys could see the edges of the town. *We're almost home!* Their boots made a crunching sound with each step upon packed-down snow. A large black panel truck slid through the snow-covered intersection. Jacob waited for his two companions to arrive. Suddenly, something felt wrong to Jacob.

When the younger boys caught up, they turned south onto Altgasse. Walking was treacherous, as there was ice underneath the snowfall. Cars and buses traveled in the same narrow pathways through the snowy streets, with steam and smoke trailing out from their warm tailpipes. Sidewalks in front of businesses were mostly shoveled, although elsewhere the footing remained troublesome. Even with boots, it was almost impossible to walk rapidly without falling. The howling wind built huge drifts, obscuring some local landmarks and signs. *Were it not for the dangerous Brown Shirts, this trip could actually be fun.*

Halfway between Altgasse and Breitenfelder, the small stores gave way to scrubby empty lots, abandoned garages and sheds. Snow blew into Jacob’s eyes as they turned into the wind. The tiny white flakes were pushed sideways by the fierce wind as they fell from steel-gray skies. It was beginning to darken. The days were so short now. Jacob’s eyes began to water, reacting to the wind and snow. For no particular reason, Jacob turned and looked behind them. *It was so hard to see that day. My eyes were filled with tears and melted snow. How could they get so close to us without my knowledge?*

Jacob was startled to see five older students walking briskly in his direction, all of them wearing brown shirts with Nazi swastika emblems. Despite the cold and wind, the boys proudly wore their Nazi shirts on the outside, over their coats. Nothing, it seemed, would prevent these kids from proudly displaying their Nazi symbols. Jacob hated those twisted crosses. The boys and young men who wore the swastika armbands seemed bent upon flashing them into the face of every Jew that passed them by. Jacob hated them because they picked openly upon women and children. They enjoyed inflicting fear and distress upon the

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weakest of Jacob's people.

Watching the brown shirts approaching, Jacob's heart fluttered. He quickly looked in every direction for people. *We'll be all right in a crowd. Where is everyone?* They would all be safe if they could just blend into a group of adults. But adults were nowhere to be found. It was simply too cold to be outside. Minutes earlier they were surrounded by dozens of people. But they had passed the stores, cafes and shops of Sterneckerstrasse and the crowds of shoppers were gone.

Jacob opened his mouth to tell his friends to be quiet, that they were in trouble, when he suddenly saw five more brown-shirted older boys heading in their direction from Breitenfelder. Jacob's heart raced up into his throat and began to pound heavily. Each of them had heard the Jew-hating speeches on the radio. Last summer most of their gentile friends had gone away to a special camp. They returned hating Jews. Even though Jacob recalled playing with some of these boys as children, they were now eager to punish him. He had become an enemy. Jacob had never hated anyone. But, these brown-shirted boys wanted desperately to hurt him and his friends – and only because they were Jews.

Jacob heard the fearful radio broadcast as he recalled the terrible fear of that snowy afternoon. Austrian residents were implored to “wipe out the Jewish menace.” The announcer told the audience that it was now the citizen's responsibility to repel the Jew and drive him out from our Aryan land. “They are a cancer, a curse upon the true Aryan people. This Jew festers and draws its sustenance upon us. It is now a matter of national pride and dignity that Jews be punished for their crimes and pestilence against society.”

It was in this climate that ten boys in brown shirts approached Jacob and his companions with malice and hatred in their hearts. Many of them felt pride in pummeling Jews as their “civic duty.” None of them felt the slightest compassion or empathy for the smaller boys who had done nothing to offend them.

It began to snow harder, the heavy white flakes driving at Jacob's eyes each time he turned around. The snowflakes stung his eyes and made it increasingly difficult to see. The boys behind were closer than the boys in front, and they were gaining ground rapidly. Jacob spoke rapidly and with authority. “Isaac, Saul... come closer.” The other boys knew from the tone of Jacob's voice that something was wrong. Jacob spoke, almost in a whisper. “We're in trouble.” The smaller boys swiveled their heads rapidly in every direction. When they looked back at Jacob, their eyes were wide with fear.

Isaac was substantially smaller than the older Saul and Jacob. Saul and Isaac still had the side-curls typical of Jewish males until their Bar Mitzvah. Jacob thought that was unsafe. *They might as well have advertised themselves as Jews. They might as well have hung a large printed sign upon their shoulders. Jews Here! Come and Get Your Jews!* Jacob looked at their side-curls now. They seemed to float upon the breeze, like wispy wings that hung off of their small heads. Both of the younger boys looked at Jacob pleadingly for help. *It's up to me! I must protect them.*

Jacob wished that his two best friends were with him now. Adam Levy was

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his oldest friend. Adam was a little shorter than Jacob. Otherwise, they could have passed for twins. They shared the same classes at school and at Hebrew School. During school vacations, they were always together. Chaim Weitzman was Jacob's other close friend. Although they became friends later in life, they were brothers in arms, writing short stories together. Adam and Chaim would have been most welcome in such an emergency. But his best protection was Hershel Farber. Hershel had a thin head, with narrow eyes and large ears. Although he was not very physically appealing, he was a tremendous fighter. Many times in recent months, Hershel had rescued smaller Jewish friends as they were being beaten by the brown shirts. Those friends would have fought to the death for Jacob, as he would fight for them. Unfortunately, they were not with him. Jacob, it seemed, would have to come up with a plan on his own.

"Isaac, run left. Try to make it to the butcher shop on Thengasse. Cut through the alley!" Jacob suddenly realized that he was screaming. With deliberation, he calmed himself. He had to maintain order for the sake of his two smaller friends.

"Yes, I understand," replied Isaac. Their eyes met for a moment. It seemed oddly out of place, but Jacob realized for the first time that Isaac had green eyes. Perhaps it was a reflection from the snowy sky. Still, Jacob marveled at how opaque those green eyes were. Jacob hoped that Isaac could read less fear in his own eyes than he saw in Isaac's.

Jacob looked at Saul. He was trembling. His mouth seemed to form a perpetual "O" shape. His breath came in short, raspy gasps. He looked anxiously in both directions, as the brown-shirted menace approached. Jacob noticed that Saul's legs were shaking. He was blinking his eyes rapidly. Grasping his arms, he looked directly into Saul's eyes. "Listen to me. Run as fast as you can north. Try to get to Rocklbrunn Street. Then turn right on Vogelweider. Run into any of the stores that seem to have a lot of people!" Saul looked back, with his large, sad brown sad eyes. He tried to smile, but it turned into a grimace. Jacob was reasonably certain that Saul understood that he did not have a chance to reach civilization before the brown shirts would catch him. Still, he turned and began to run north on Altgasse. From behind, Jacob heard him faintly say, "Good luck." Yes. They would all need a lot of luck.

Jacob ran in the opposite direction, towards the end of town. His hope was to draw as many of the brown shirts as possible away from his friends. Jacob ran. He ran as hard and as fast as he had ever run. Fear was the supreme motivator. At one point, he remembered looking behind, to see how many of them were following him. It looked like at least four or five. That was good, he thought. His companions just might make it. He had at least evened the odds a bit for his traveling companions.

Jacob recalled the panic of running for his life and with it the dread. He remembered the intense terror that came from the absolute certainty that he could not escape. He was now running away from where people were. Plus, the brown shirts were older and stronger than him. They ran faster. There was no place to hide. The punishment would be severe, possibly fatal. What would his parents think? What about Rachael? But he ran on. There was nothing else to do.

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As Jacob ran into the alley leading towards Samergasse he could hear two distinct sounds. One sound was the roar of engines on Samergasse. There would be traffic for Jacob to use as cover or possibly protection. Unfortunately, the other sound was footsteps on the pavement behind him.

They had crossed from snow-covered grass to pavement, upon which much of the snow had thawed in the sun of the early afternoon. Jacob's legs felt like they were on fire. Each time he inhaled, he felt a strong stitch in his side. Despite the freezing temperatures, Jacob was sweating profusely. His heart pounded in his chest so hard, he thought it might explode. He ran past Steinhouergasse, hoping to see some traffic. There were no people to see in any direction. He ran towards Samergasse, because it was a major street. It was wider and carried more traffic. In order to get there, Jacob had to go through an alley. He ran towards that alley as fast as he could. He could now hear the boys behind him gasping for breath. The freezing cold air seemed incapable of supplying Jacob with enough oxygen. The hoarse, throaty breathing of the boys chasing him was too close. The sound of their footsteps was terrifyingly close.

The pain of running was now an agony of tremendous proportion. Jacob could barely feel his legs. His strength was spent. The pain in his side was overpowering with each breath. Jacob tried to focus on the traffic that was now only the length of the alley away. Every few seconds, a car or truck passed into view. He was so close now – only another hundred meters to freedom and safety! But the footsteps from behind grew too close. As Jacob reached the middle of the alley, his left leg clipped a rain gutter on the side of a butcher shop. He tripped. Jacob remembered how it felt to fly through the air sideways with arms and legs spinning uncontrollably. He recalled how strange it felt to be totally airborne, if only for a moment. The world spun around Jacob as his body blasted through the freezing air. *It was like being on a carousel, without the carousel.* A vista of objects passed in front of him while he was airborne. He saw the white stucco walls of the butcher shop, the sky filled with puffy gray clouds and the red brick wall of the bar on the other side of the alley. Jacob sprawled to the right upon descent and fell directly into an enormous gray garbage can. The dented garbage can lid shot out to the left, spinning through the air. As he landed, his head created a prodigious dent in the middle of the can, crumpling it. He remembered the auspicious bang.

Jacob lay there, sprawled out on the freezing ground of the alley, gasping for breath. The garbage can lay next to him, with a fair amount of trash sprinkled nearby. He could smell the rancid odor of rotten meat and gagged upon it. He knew that he should get up and run. The sound of traffic on the nearby street was like a hum from heaven to Jacob. He tried to lift his legs only to find that they would not obey. He wondered briefly if he had damaged his spine in falling. Unable to move, Jacob lay on the ground, grateful that he could at least catch his breath. That grateful feeling didn't last long.

Moments later, four brown shirt boys approached him. He looked for the others, but saw none. Apparently, some of his apprehenders were unable to maintain the chase. He briefly rejoiced in the knowledge that he could outrun most of his older adversaries. But his physical collapse left him defenseless.

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"Hey Jew," screamed a boy that Jacob knew was Karl Jurgens. He was eighteen, tall and thin. But he was also powerful. Jacob recalled running against him in a track meet the previous year. "Kike, why did you run?" Karl was literally foaming at the mouth as he screamed these words at Jacob. Pieces of spittle flew from his mouth, floating in the breeze before falling to the ground in front of Jacob.

Suddenly, Karl kicked Jacob as hard as he could, crushing two ribs on Jacob's right side. Jacob howled in agony. He had never felt so much pain. "Jew!" Karl continued to rant and kick. Jacob recoiled in agony. The stitch in his side from running was nothing compared to the agony of the broken ribs. Each time he took in a breath, his ribs screamed with pain.

"Why are you doing this to me, Karl?" asked Jacob. *We were once friends in school. What did I do to deserve this?*

Three other boys arrived, trying to catch their breath. They saw how Karl had kicked Jacob and smiled. They wanted some of that action. One of them approached Jacob from the left. Jacob believed that his name was Otto. He was large – even bigger than Karl.

"What are you good for, you stinking Jew?" he cried out. Kick him again Karl!"

Karl shot an angry glance at Otto. "Don't use my name, you idiot!"

Otto laughed. "He already knows who you are, stupid!" Otto then drew his leg back and kicked Jacob as hard as he could. Jacob's lower back exploded in pain. On his other side, Karl was still trying to kick Jacob's ribs.

Jacob knew that the boys would aim for his ribs, to maximize the damage. He therefore brought his arm down quickly and caught the blow on his upper arm instead of his ribs. Jacob screamed out again in pain. Still it was better than more broken ribs.

Karl and Otto stood in front of Jacob, while the other two boys held his arms. "We know what to do with filthy Jews like you," screamed Otto. "You people have no right to live here. You are filth. You are feces. You are worse than insects." Otto continued to scream such insults at Jacob as rapidly as he could think of them. Karl returned to kicking Jacob while swearing at him. With his arms held up, Jacob's ribs were again defenseless. One of the kicks broke a rib on Jacob's left side. He screamed in agony. Otto could see that he had done some serious damage there. "Hold him tight Leo," screamed Otto at one of the boys holding Jacob's arms. Leo grabbed Otto by his coat and shook him. "Stop using our names – fool!" Otto shook loose and returned to tormenting Jacob. He continued to kick the same spot on Jacob's left side, until blood began to flow from Jacob's nostrils and mouth. *I remember the feeling of warm blood running down my frozen face. It was both frightening and comforting.* The broken ribs had punctured his left lung.

Otto looked down at the garbage near his feet. With deliberation, he bent down and grabbed a pile of garbage in his gloved hands. Jacob noticed that it contained some very old and moldy vegetables and pieces of maggoty sausage. The pile also contained cigarette and cigar butts and ashes. "Look at it," screamed Otto. Jacob stared at the tiny white worms crawling in the sausage. Otto smiled

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as he looked back down at Jacob. “This is what you are.” Otto was again screaming directly into Jacob’s face. “You Jews are garbage. You kikes are all trash.” His spittle flew towards Jacob and fell upon his left cheek. It felt warm and soft. “Hold him,” said Otto to his colleagues. He began to shove the garbage into Jacob’s mouth. Jacob was overwhelmingly repulsed. He tasted the combination of moldy vegetables and sausage first. Then he tasted the ashes. The more he tried to spit it out, the harder Otto pushed it in. Jacob’s stomach cramped and he felt himself beginning to vomit. He retched. The boys holding him stepped to the side. He retched again and this time a stream of vomit followed. This action blessedly forced Otto a few feet away. *It was the thought of maggots in my mouth.*

Jacob collapsed to the ground. He was devastated, emotionally and physically. The pain from his broken ribs was agonizing. It seared through his chest like daggers with each breath. Bright red blood flowed from his nostrils down the front of his face to his neck, where it pooled. He recalled thinking, for a moment, how good it would feel to be dead. His mouth was filled with blood. He discovered that the pain was not as horrible if he took very shallow breaths. He was dizzy and nauseous. Writhing on the ground in pain, he gazed up at the steel-gray winter sky. A delicate pure white snowflake drifted across the sky, landing on a nearby juniper branch. It danced momentarily on the branch, reflecting the opaque light of the failing afternoon, before tumbling slowly to the ground. He wondered, in an offhand manner, how life could be so beautiful and so horrible at the same time. But, the world was fading away.

Karl, who had been silent for a while, suddenly returned. He was carrying a stick with something on the end. Jacob’s vision was dim. Solid objects seemed to sway by themselves. Karl whispered something to Otto. *I’m having trouble focusing. Sounds seem so far away.* They shared a brief laugh and again approached Jacob. Then, they bent over him. Jacob’s ears were ringing loudly. He had trouble hearing what his tormentors were saying. Only some of the words came through. “You Jews are shit,” screamed Karl. “Do you know that, you filthy kike? People who are shit should eat it.”

Karl continued to scream, but Jacob was slipping to darkness. He heard Leo, somewhere to his left. “Hey Karl, he’s got a lot of blood coming out. I think he’s hurt pretty bad.” Then, someone pushed the end of the stick into his mouth. When Jacob smelled the feces, he knew that it was real. He retched again, although this time nothing emerged except a string of silvery red mucous. He spit out the feces as best he could. When he looked down, he saw that his new coat was covered with blood and garbage. Every movement caused agony in his chest and side. He waited for the peace of death.

“Go get some more,” Jacob heard one of the boys say. Karl obediently pulled the stick back and walked away. The boys holding Jacob were now screaming with glee. “You’re just getting some of what you deserve, you stupid filthy Jew boy!” Each time one of the boys pulled his arm in any direction, pain flared out across his side and in his chest. Jacob coughed and bright red blood flew from his mouth and nostrils. A large bubble of blood lay upon the end of his nostril. It expanded and contracted with each breath, like a tiny red balloon,

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inflating and deflating. Turning sideways, he spat a huge mouthful of bright blood. It fell onto the pristine white snow, sparkling as it rapidly melted through it. As the world swam around him and the boys' voices became faint, Jacob finally wished for death. His pain had become unbearable. *I feel so ashamed. These boys have made me into garbage. I hope that my friends made it to the shops safely. I am relieved that none of them saw me like this. I feel so embarrassed.*

Suddenly, Jacob heard a new voice. It came from near the street. It was the sound of a man. "Hey, what are you guys doing there?" Someone screamed, but who was it? The brown shirt boys disappeared into the woods. Jacob wanted to get up, but he found himself unable to move. Moments later, the wide face of a large man wearing a huge white apron appeared above him. Jacob's vision was failing. Who was it? The man held what appeared to be a meat cleaver in his right hand. Was it the local butcher? Darkness was fast overtaking Jacob as he remained on the frozen ground, near his vomit and the pile of garbage. Each breath was a labor now, with ever more blood emerging from his nostrils. Finally, the world disappeared completely.

Jacob spent almost a week in the hospital, recovering from the most violent beating that the hospital staff could recall seeing. The brown shirt gang was never punished for beating Jacob within an inch of his life. In fact, Jacob was forced to leave the hospital early because it "no longer served Jews." But his friends had made it to safety that day. Jacob was grateful for that. He remembered listening to his father call his name as he regained consciousness. It was the best sound he had ever heard. As long as he was with his father, nothing bad could happen. Or so he thought at the time.

Jacob heard his father calling his name again. This time, however, he was home. He was again listening to the droning Nazi propaganda on the radio. "Are you all right, Jacob?" He realized that he had been wandering in the past. He blinked hard and brought himself into the present. The man on the radio continued to blare warnings about the "Jewish threat."

"Yes," replied Jacob. But I don't think I'll ever really be the same again." Moshe offered a wry smile, somehow understanding that Jacob's mind was reliving his terrible punishment at the hands of the brown shirts. In the two years since that beating, Jacob's family was less safe, less secure and less wanted than ever in their own community. Jacob wondered what it was like for Jews in other countries under German control. Was this scenario repeated? Were Jewish boys and girls elsewhere in Europe subjected to inhumane treatment by their gentile neighbors? It seemed beyond reason that former classmates and friends now cursed them for being Jewish. Why?

Since 1937, Jacob had heard about Jews who were rounded up by the Einsatzgruppen, vicious trained killers who moved about Europe with the assistance of the German armed forces and the SS. They executed many Jews on-site, sent others to labor camps and moved entire families out of their homes into a "ghetto." He had also heard about Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and disabled people that were deported by Germany to "the East." The German army promised Jews a "labor camp" where they would "work towards their own freedom."

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Jacob now lived in fear of being sent to such a place. Everyone who remained spoke of such things at the synagogue. There were always fresh rumors about Jewish relatives in other cities who had been sent by Germany to *work camps*, to be used as a labor force in building bombs for the army. By 1939, there were whispers and dark rumors of much worse treatment. Some people told of Jews who were sent to “shower rooms” where their heads were shaved and then the rooms were filled with poison gas. Many people laughed and dismissed this as just a rumor, to frighten the Jews or to bring them into control. Still, it was difficult to account for relatives who seemed to have suddenly disappeared from the “labor” camps, with no letters or forwarding addresses.

Jacob, recalling his own near-death experience at the hands of Austrian nationals, could not easily dismiss these rumors. Something evil was at work in Europe and for Jacob it came in the guise of brown-shirted youth and new laws that made Jews second-class citizens. This evil infection of hate had become insidious in the culture. It now spread, like some terrible virus. It made common citizens mistrust and hate their neighbors. The peaceful isolation provided by Salzburg’s towering white-capped mountains could not protect the Jews of Salzburg from the coming tragedy. When displaced by the Nazis in 1940, the Jewish population of Salzburg numbered less than two hundred – with just one synagogue and one Rabbi. Upon conclusion, not a single Jew would remain alive in this city once considered an idyllic vacation spot for the aristocracy of Europe.

Jacob endured the Nazi propaganda and thought about how he, Rachael and his close friends had tempted fate by trying to trick German soldiers. *How naïve we were*. They even toyed with the new terror of Salzburg, The Gestapo – Hitler’s secret police. *How could we have been so stupid?*

Jacob and Rachael were not only talented musicians; they also spoke several languages, in addition to their normal Yiddish. Jacob spoke French, German and Russian. Rachael spoke German, Hungarian and English. In the beginning, they decided to remove the Star of David from their clothing and visit coffeehouses and bars, disguising themselves as Christian visitors. There, they sometimes spoke a foreign language in an effort to confuse the German soldiers. It was a silly game that made them feel as though they had some imaginary influence over the conquering Hun. As time passed, they became increasingly bold by making insulting and derogatory remarks about the Germans and their culture. During the winter of 1939-1940, Jacob and Rachael were at their best, flaunting their fluency in other languages or pretending not to understand German.

Had the Germans known that these hormonally challenged adolescents were Jewish, Jacob and his friends would have been arrested on the spot and sent to a prison camp. But, they passed themselves off well – at first. The only problem was that they had to remember which language and dialect they used at which coffeehouse or bar – and in the presence of which Germans. If it was Bavarian at the Ram’s Horn Inn the first time, it must be Bavarian every time there. They knew that the Germans were listening and a mistake would be caught. With time and practice, they learned to identify Germans by unit, rank and sometimes by

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name. The regular Wehrmacht soldiers wore gray uniforms. The SS soldiers wore black uniforms. And the Gestapo usually wore black trench coats. That is, unless they were operating undercover, in which case they wore civilian clothing. They were, at first, fascinated with the Gestapo. Too late, they realized that they were playing with fire.

Telling their parents that they were at each other's house, Jacob and Rachael met halfway between their buildings and ventured into the city's myriad of coffeehouses, bars restaurants and lodges. The Germans made them feel shame for their religion, so Jacob and Rachael found tricking the Germans a way to fight back, even if it accomplished nothing. Taking a table within earshot of the Germans, Jacob and Rachael selected a dialect of German or a foreign language and spoke loud enough for the Germans to hear them. Each would try to outdo the other. They sounded like actors rehearsing badly in public. The Gestapo often stared at them with open contempt. And, while Jacob and Rachael laughed all the way home after such escapades, their planning had one major fault. They had not anticipated that the same German soldier or spy might attend different establishments in different clothing or in a disguise.

For almost two years, Jacob and Rachael were uproariously successful in passing themselves off as foreigners or as cultured, vacationing Germans and Austrians. By October 1939, they were so good at this that they began to invite some of their friends from school to watch them "perform." Unbeknownst to them, one particular Gestapo officer, Lieutenant Johan Goring, was observant enough to notice that Rachael spoke with a perfect Bavarian accent one night in one bar, and yet spoke only French in another bar, just two nights later. Lt. Goring also noted on the second night that three of their friends had joined them, watching and laughing at their raucous humor. As he was trained to "look for the Jew everywhere," Goring also noticed that the newcomers and the two originals had similar features. They all seemed to have dark hair, often curly – and brown eyes. One evening, he noticed that their coats had pieces of gold thread where a Jew would have displayed the Star of David. He was certain that they were Jews. Finally, one cold and rainy evening, he felt ready to test his theory.

Rachael stood at the bar in the Hotel Caspian, where she pretended to be a visitor from France. She had two fresh mugs of beer, one in each hand. As she turned around to return to her table, a strong arm grabbed her from behind. She swiveled to see a large man in a business suit holding onto her with a grip that meant business. In German, Goring said, "I am Lieutenant Goring of the Gestapo. Perhaps you could tell me why you spoke fluent German only two nights ago at the Ram's Horn Inn and you now seem only to speak French."

Rachael was frozen with fear. She had seen him before. But, he had always been in a Gestapo uniform! Her heart was suddenly pounding rapidly in her chest. Suddenly, it wasn't a game any longer. *What should I do?* The iron grip on her arm tightened even harder, cutting off circulation. She winced at the pain. "Show me your papers," demanded Goring.

Of course, neither Jacob nor Rachael had foreseen the need to create false papers. Her own papers revealed a Jewish identity. She looked at Jacob for help. But Jacob was deeply engrossed in a pretend conversation with his friend Saul,

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in Russian. Rachael's head was swimming with fear. She looked around in the bar and quickly estimated no fewer than twelve German soldiers, plus two SS officers near the door. She mentally screamed at Jacob for help. Still, he looked the other way. Goring began screaming at her, demanding her identity papers.

Rachael, still playing her game, responded in French as though she did not understand. Perspiration was now dripping down the side of her face. She was dizzy and feared that she would soon faint. The room seemed to be spinning. Suddenly, Goring slapped her face hard enough to draw blood from her nose. "I said, show me your papers!" Her plight was beginning to attract attention around the bar. *They will arrest me and I will never see Jacob or my family again.* The room was spinning faster. She wished that she had not consumed two beers already. They had gone to her head. Rachael fought off fainting as hard as possible, knowing that she would wake up at Gestapo headquarters if she were to pass out. She shook her head from side to side and blinked hard. The Gestapo officer asked, "Is that your friend over there?" He pointed directly at Jacob.

Rachael desperately needed to protect Jacob. But Goring had seen them together at the other bar. She was now certain of it. *I must warn Jacob. But how can I do it?* At the same moment, Jacob looked up at the bar and saw instantly that the Gestapo had captured Rachael. His heart fluttered up into his throat and seemed to skip a beat or two. He stopped breathing. Unexpectedly, the game was no longer a game. A wave of nausea passed over him. He felt food and beer moving up from his stomach. *I cannot become sick now.* He said something to Saul without looking at him. Saul looked at the bar and slowly got up from his chair. He began walking carefully to the exit, glancing at the SS officers near the door. With a calm demeanor, Jacob stood up, put his coat on, grabbed Rachael's coat and walked towards the bar. At the same time, he saw Goring motion to someone near the door. Turning slowly, Jacob saw that the two SS officers had positioned themselves to block the doorway. They were trapped. Saul stood motionless, in no-man's-land.

Jacob's mind whirred as he walked to the bar. To capitulate was never a part of his plan. Instead, he swallowed hard and walked directly to Rachael. As he neared the bar, he saw that Goring was smiling broadly. Over the noise of the crowd, he heard Goring say something like, "You Jews will burn for doing this." *So, they burn Jews after all? Did he mean it figuratively?* Jacob had never been able to shake off the dreadful nightmare in which he had been forced to burn dead Jews at a death camp. Goring's comment stirred that powerful anxiety.

Jacob, who intended only to speak with Rachael, walked instead directly to Goring. Saying nothing at all, Jacob stood toe to toe with him, staring directly into his steel-gray eyes. In Rachael's mind, time had suddenly slowed down. She was terribly frightened. But, she marveled at Jacob's bravery. And, she suddenly knew that he would always defend her with his own life. She swiftly loved him more deeply and totally than ever before.

It seemed to Rachael that Jacob and Goring stood toe-to-toe for ages, although it probably was only seconds. Abruptly, Jacob grabbed the two mugs filled with beer in each of Rachael's hands, and flung them into Goring's face. At the same moment, he shoved Rachael's coat into her hands and grabbed her right

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arm. As they turned to run, Jacob took a moment to glance back at Goring, who was now clutching his face and shaking his head vigorously.

With Goring temporarily blinded, and with Rachael in tow, Jacob ran behind the bar to the hallway leading to the kitchen. There was only one entrance to the bar that was visible from the street. Jacob prayed that there was another doorway from the kitchen. They ran past lavatories on the left, bumping into a fat old man coming out. He yelled something at them. *The lavatories are a dead end, even with windows.* Jacob pushed his way through waiters into the kitchen. Cooks swiveled pans of food over large swathes of fire, with more food boiling in huge steamy pots upon an enormous hooded stove. Jacob and Rachael ran through the bustling kitchen, shoving people aside. Food-filled pots and pans were now flying through the air as Jacob and Rachael bumped into preoccupied cooks and waiters balancing several plates simultaneously. Everyone, it seemed, was now screaming at them in anger.

As they reached the end of an aisle, Jacob turned sharply and Rachael slipped to the floor. Her feet went completely out from under her as she slid into a metal cupboard at one end of the steamy room. As Jacob reached down to help her up, he saw Goring enter the kitchen. Beer was dripping from his hair and face. Two more German soldiers were in tow. Observing Jacob and Rachael, Goring pulled a pistol from his holster. As he walked towards them, Rachael turned to look at Jacob. Her face was a contorted mask, overwhelmed with fear. Jacob picked Rachael up from the floor, but now Goring was near. He stopped and raised his pistol. Everyone fell to the floor, except Jacob and Rachael. Without thinking, Jacob grabbed a huge pot that had been boiling on the edge of the stove. With both hands, he threw the pot and its boiling contents upon the angry Gestapo officer.

Goring screamed with surprise and pain. He clutched his face again, this time in agony. As Goring grabbed at his burning face, he dropped his gun. It clattered to the floor at Rachael's feet. She bent over, grabbed the gun and ran with Jacob around the corner.

To their great relief, Jacob and Rachael saw a doorway directly in front of them. They ran for it, only to see it blocked by a very large and angry chef. The angry Bohemian chef was about forty years old, with huge muscles, a very thin dark moustache and a very mean expression. He held a large meat cleaver threateningly in his right hand. The chef was furious about damage to the kitchen and the long wait for food that his customers would now endure. He glared down at them with a fearsome expression.

Turning around, Jacob saw that Goring was now standing again. His face was as red as a tomato. He looked like someone who had been very badly sunburned. Jacob grabbed the gun from Rachael and pointed it at the chef. "Move," yelled Jacob. But the chef simply stared at them. Goring was almost upon them. "Move or I'll shoot," screamed Jacob. Still, the chef held his ground. Jacob pointed the gun up, over the chef's head and cocked the trigger. He intended only a warning shot. He pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

Jacob surmised that the safety must still be on. He looked all over the gun helplessly, searching for a safety. Jacob had fired a rifle in Boy Scout camp.

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However, he had never held a handgun before and had no idea what to look for. Then, he saw a very small lever near the handle. He tried it and it moved about half an inch, with a satisfying click at the end. He again pointed the gun and squeezed the trigger. This time the result was a deafening explosion. The pistol kicked unexpectedly, pushing Jacob's hand and wrist backwards. The bullet ricochet bounced off of counters and cupboards. Everyone in the kitchen stopped and ducked in fear. The chef moved away quickly. *Oh my God, I've fired a gun!* Jacob tingled with emotion. His mind reeled with conflicting feelings. *Despite the fear, I've never felt more exhilarated!*

At the doorway, Jacob turned and saw Goring still bearing down at them. He resembled a red-faced lobster-monster, with arms flailing out in both directions. His face was bright red, his shirt had come out from his pants and the contents of the boiling pot that Jacob had thrown were all over him. Particles of food clung to his face and coat. His arms were pumping as he attempted to gain speed. But Goring was overweight and not very fast. Again, Jacob pointed the gun up and fired another shot over everyone's head. *I must not hit anyone – only frighten the Germans!* Unarmed now, Goring tried to drop to the floor. Instead, his feet flew out in front of him. He fell directly upon his butt, sliding across the linoleum floor. Jacob saw two nearby cooks laughing as he grabbed Rachael and dashed out the door.

Jacob and Rachael ran as fast as they could through dark alleys and behind storefronts. Wherever possible, they ran in shadows. Fortunately, it was a moonless night. Almost nothing was visible away from the city lights. They could hear the SS officers running behind them. They blew whistles and screamed at each other. But Jacob and Rachael knew every inch of the city and the Germans did not. Finally, after about half an hour, they stopped in a dark alley to rest. They could hear the commotion they had caused several blocks away. Suddenly, Rachael whispered to Jacob, "What about Saul? They saw him sitting with you!" Jacob had been so busy with their escape that he had forgotten about Saul. What if he was now being interrogated with the Germans? "Rachael, there's nothing we can do for Saul now. Let's just hope that he somehow found his way out."

They sat underneath the doorway to a large furniture factory, trying to catch their breath. They were both too winded to speak for a while. Moments later, Rachael was able to talk. She grasped Jacob's face in her hands and kissed him full on the lips. "That's for saving me," she whispered hoarsely. He saw her powerful emotion. Jacob, meanwhile, was deep in thought. Every nerve in his body was tingling. *Something deep inside of me was awakened tonight. I can't put my finger on it, but it feels like I am a different person. It was as though I was doing the right thing by fighting.* He looked at his beautiful Rachael and smiled. But, it was a tentative smile. "What is it, Jacob? What is bothering you? *Should I tell her?*" Jacob reasoned that there were only two people in which he could confide everything. One was his beloved father. The other was Rachael, his soul mate.

He began slowly. "Rachael, I find this hard to describe. But, because of what we did tonight, I feel different. When I fired the gun in the tavern, it felt somehow... right. It felt like the right thing to do. Oh Rachael, I don't know how

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to say this, but it feels as though something deep inside has awakened. My life has suddenly changed and a new destiny is calling to me. I feel as though I am supposed to do something important.” Jacob’s voice dropped to almost a whisper. “I feel as though I am supposed to lead men into battle. I think that my destiny is to fight the Germans, but I’m not sure how, or where, or with what weapons.”

He kicked absently at a nearby rock, causing it to tumble into a thicket of dead weeds. When he continued, Rachael heard the strength in his voice. “Whatever happened tonight, it was a signal to me. Somehow, somewhere, I am to be a leader. I feel this deep in my bones, Rachael. I cannot tell you why. I have no experience with weapons or warfare. I have never been a leader. But, as God is my witness, I know that my destiny is to fight back at the Germans, who have made our lives miserable.” He said all of this while looking at the ground. Suddenly, he looked up into Rachael’s eyes. “Oh Rachael, something has begun that is very terrible. I am beginning to understand that my nightmare was a warning. We must prepare for a terrible future in which fighting back may be the only way that we can stay alive.”

Rachael offered a flicker of a smile and put her arms around him. She squeezed him tightly and whispered in his ear. “Whatever happens, Jacob, I will be at your side.”

To their great relief, Saul was in school the next day. He had been able to sneak out of the front door when everyone was chasing Jacob and Rachael from the back of the inn. This marked the final time that Jacob and Rachael would deliberately provoke the Germans.

The propaganda speech that Jacob and his father had been listening to was ending. A wild crowd cheered in the background as a band began playing the German national anthem. Jacob sat in silence, deep in thought. *What can cause a society to prey upon its own innocent people?* He understood that many Europeans had for generations mistrusted Jews. They did so because their parents taught them to mistrust or hate Jews. It was not uncommon for families to perpetuate such hatred from generation to generation. And, Jacob understood that Jews have been persecuted in almost every society. *The Romans tortured and killed tens of thousands of Jews because they would not renounce their religion. The Spanish inquisition killed at least a million Jews, while making refugees of millions more. The Crusades, in the name of Jesus Christ, killed over a million Jews. I suppose it is now my turn to endure that which my ancestors had to endure.* Now, there was no place to go. It was in fact unlawful to aid or hide a Jew, or to protect him from forced relocation.

As the months passed, new laws were enacted to “contain the Jewish problem.” The laws were very restrictive. For Jacob and his parents, the law confined them to a small geographical boundary. They were not allowed outside of the so-called “Jewish ghetto” without permission. Those caught outside without permission could be summarily shot. Although the Jews of Europe had for centuries contributed mightily to the arts, culture, science, medicine, higher education and law of their communities, they were now considered enemies of the people. Those who sympathized with Jewish causes often disappeared, never to

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return. Even countries like Hungary, where Jews had equal rights before the war, now bowed to the authority of Germany. The Nazis planned to “cleanse” Europe of each and every Jew, and anyone who interfered with that plan was simply removed, permanently.

Chapter 4

Undying Love

Jacob's thoughts, like most adolescents, often shifted to the one person who had most significantly dominated his definition of paradise for the past three years, his girlfriend, Rachael Goldberg. In fact, Rachael was never out of Jacob's mind for more than a minute or two. Jacob's infatuation with Rachael had become obsessive. His thoughts rarely strayed from Rachael's shapely figure, perfect facial features and long dark hair. From the moment that Jacob was introduced to Rachael and first gazed into her large, dreamy brown eyes – Jacob was captivated. Later, he would tell people that something deep inside pulled him to Rachael. He was amazed at this feeling, describing it as more spiritual than visceral. Although he greatly loved his parents, Jacob had never before experienced such a powerful, personal magnetic force. Every minute without Rachael was painful. She pulled upon the fabric of his soul with an unexpected and impressive force. And, each time that he saw Rachael, they became increasingly intimate. Within just a few weeks, they were hopelessly and permanently in love.

Rachael, her younger sister Anna, and her father, Ariel, moved to Salzburg from Munich four years earlier. Rachael's mother died during a virulent influenza epidemic in 1937. Despite having a good income and a very nice apartment, Ariel was despondent. Everything about their home in Munich reminded him of his wife, Greta. So, he decided to look for a hospital-posting elsewhere. When the Salzburg St. Johannes Hospital advertised an opening for an orthopedic surgeon in 1937, he jumped at the opportunity. Ariel and his daughters became infatuated with the rare beauty of Salzburg. It was geographically and socially very different from the big city environment of Munich. He felt that it was the perfect place to raise his daughters and to create a new life for himself. Although the Jewish "quarter" of Salzburg was located in a less desirable part of the city, the apartments were nice and very large. The rental cost was also much lower than in Munich. Anna and Rachael quickly made new friends and entered the public school system in Salzburg. Ariel was welcomed at the hospital, particularly with the Jewish doctors. Among them was Moshe Silverman, one of the most skilled and respected physicians in Salzburg. However, it was his personality that endeared everyone to Moshe Silverman. He was a very gentle, kind, soft-spoken and cheerful man. The two soon became close friends, spending weekends and evenings with each other. Before long, Rachael and Jacob, who were only months apart in age, quickly became close friends.

By coincidence, Jacob and Rachael played string instruments. Jacob, like his mother, played violin. Rachael played viola. They enjoyed many pleasing evenings together playing Mozart, Beethoven and Bach. In particular, they loved to play Mozart's *Symphonia Concertante* in E-Flat, for violin and viola. It seemed to be a perfect choice. They played the lead instruments and they played in

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Mozart's hometown. Their love of Mozart turned into frequent entertainment for relatives and friends. Both of them were talented musicians. But, Jacob's talent was clearly superior. He had been playing violin since he was a small child, guided ably by his mother's teaching. At first, Jacob had raged within himself about playing violin. Of course, he had the hands of a child, and he cursed himself for having such small fingers. However, his mother was persistent and Jacob's talent excelled over all of his classmates in school. In fact, his talent astonished his orchestra instructor. In third grade, Jacob played as well or better than most secondary school students.

Jacob's parents wanted him to go to a music school in Paris. There, along with other remarkably talented youth, Jacob would become one of the most talented violinists in Europe. Jacob, on the other hand, was more interested in medicine. He wanted to attend the Medical College of Berlin, and become a physician, like his father. Unfortunately, under Nazi rule, Jews were no longer allowed to attend either of those schools. Jacob's career plans had suddenly turned into a hopeless dream.

Jacob knew that he was in love the first time that he had kissed Rachael. It was a life-changing event. They danced together at the Bar Mitzvah reception for the brother of a mutual friend. The klezmer band had been playing loud raucous music much of the evening. They played *Hava Negilah* as everyone danced madly in circles. Eventually, the music slowed down. Jacob was not a good dancer, particularly when the music was slow. However, he could not take his hands off of Rachael. She was equally captivated by the moment. As the slow dance music filled the hall, they approached each other. At first, they were clumsy. Neither of them was very experienced with dancing. With rigid arms, they held their hands out, away from their bodies, which were separated by the distance of their arms. Neither of them danced with the beat. They were like stiff mannequins, or people made of wood. Their bodies moved, but not in unison. Still, there was something akin to electricity whenever they touched. Jacob quickly glanced around the dance floor to see who might be observing his error-filled performance. He was perspiring. But his heart continued to race, faster and faster. His dream girl was in his arms for the very first time. Jacob fretted desperately that Rachael might not feel the same way about him. He would have been devastated.

Then, their eyes met and the world faded away. Everything in Jacob's peripheral vision seemed to diminish into darkness, while his body and Rachael's grew close. The sound of the band receded. It remained a soft reminder of the exterior world. Rachael curled her left arm around Jacob's neck. With tenderness, her fingers moved up the back of his head. She smiled shyly and played with his dark, curly hair. For a moment, Jacob wondered if someone (the Bar Mitzvah reception police?) would throw them out. It didn't matter. At that moment, nothing in the world was more important than Rachael. He observed every detail of her appearance and instantly committed it to memory. Her large brown eyes glistened. He noticed how Rachael's long, shiny dark hair curled up at the ends, in striking contrast to the starkness of her white neck and shoulders. It was also curled on each side, over her ears and neck. He remembered how vividly it

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shined, framing her face with sublime softness. Her nose was perfect – not too narrow or too wide. Her skin was warm, supple and soft. He noticed every tiny imperfection. Her perfume was intoxicating. Everything about her radiated beauty, softness and desire.

Jacob was lost in her sparkling deep brown eyes. He placed his hand upon her face for the first time, cradling it in the soft, warm palm of his right hand and drew her close to him. Their lips met in an epiphany of sublime joy. Jacob wanted that moment to last forever. And, in his mind – he knew it would. Nothing else mattered – not then, not ever.

The band stopped playing. Jacob and Rachael stood in the center of the dance floor. Slowly, they met in a glorious, passionate kiss. Jacob's heart was pounding so hard that he was certain Rachael could feel it. As they looked into each others' eyes, Jacob realized that it was the most perfect moment in his life. *I love you Rachael. And, I will always love you. You are my destiny.* Their lives would never be the same again.

Just as Jacob recalled the passionate dance floor embrace and kiss, he was interrupted by the shrill voice of his mother. “Jacob, do you want to be late for shul? Please get up and come in for breakfast. And I want you to practice that Mendelssohn sonata before we leave.” Jacob woke up and realized that he had been dreaming of Rachael. Looking into his mirror as he washed for breakfast, Jacob wished that he had never had that other dream – that nightmare about being in a death camp. He brushed his dark wavy hair, which dissatisfied him greatly. It was always too wavy, never manageable. However, he was quite proud of the new beard that he had managed to grow. It covered much of his face, but was always neatly trimmed. Although it was predominantly dark brown, there was a hint of red on the sides. Rachael didn't like it, but Jacob thought it made him appear older, perhaps even more learned. Most of the Jewish men he knew in Salzburg had a beard. Some of them even had the characteristic curly locks of hair around their ears, defining them as Hassidic. But Jacob was not as religious and he did not spend much time with those Jews, who regarded each passing minute as an opportunity to study and interpret the Talmud. Jacob and Rachael felt more comfortable with the larger group of more secular Jewish teenagers. Of course, they both had attended Hebrew School, in addition to their public school. But they were not interested in devoting every waking minute to Jewish study. Jacob ran into the bathroom to get ready. With his thoughts on Rachael, he began to hum the Mendelssohn sonata. His ghastly dream of brutality and evil was quickly fading into the farthest reaches of his subconscious mind.

Chapter 5

Hanna's Dark History

Jacob's mother, Hanna, was a doting and nervous woman. Although only in her forties, Hanna's hair was mostly white and she had worry-wrinkles around her eyes. Jacob had heard family friends speak in hushed tones about the "problems" of her childhood. Jacob had only a year ago heard the pogrom story, and it was told by his father in a most forensic manner. Yet, Jacob still found the tale unnerving. There was something about hatred towards Jews that always bothered Jacob. He was haunted by such tales, even though the stories sometimes changed in the re-telling. He thought about the sadness and death in his mother's family. *Could it be a harbinger of something yet to come?*

Hanna was a small and delicate woman who loved Jacob more than anything. Yet, she carried a deep, intense fear that one day she would lose him. This dark fear haunted Hanna constantly. She was afraid to tell anyone about it. Sometimes she came close to telling Moshe about her unnatural fear, but each time she failed to summon the required courage. She knew what he would say. He would say that she worried too much, or that it would never happen. Still, Hanna could not shake the strong premonition that something dreadful was about to happen. She felt it in her very bones.

Jacob believed that, for some unknown reason, his mother feared him growing up. His interpretation was that she feared losing him when he moved away to attend university. He loved his mother, although he sometimes felt as though she was smothering him with her protection. He knew that she loved him, but he also recognized that she had difficulty expressing it. Occasionally, it felt more like despair. Jacob reveled in the unconditional warm love that poured out from his father. He and his father had bonded with the strongest, unrelenting endearment. They shared each other's thoughts and feelings with ease. With his mother, the relationship was somewhat strained.

Hanna's family came from a small village in Russia, near Kiev. It was called Koval. During this time in Russia, it was not uncommon for bands of criminals to roam the countryside, killing and looting small, unprotected villages. They often raided Jewish towns, since they were often not well-defended. They called such an attack a "pogrom." These gangs of criminals would steal, rape and murder at will, often for simple amusement. The Ukrainians who participated in these crimes liked to call themselves "Cossacks," after the legendary Russian cavalry. They thought of themselves as the finest horsemen of Russia, like their ancestors in the Russian army. Yet, these Cossacks were nothing more than brute thieves and common criminals. They discovered that they could get away with murder, as the government took no action to stop them. Many of them enjoyed torturing innocent people before killing them.

When Hanna was a child, the Cossacks were the worst type of plague.

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They would periodically round up and kill the males in a village, steal anything of value, burn the homes and torture and rape the women and girls. Sometimes the Cossacks would abduct women, taking them as slaves. Hanna told Jacob that her Aunt Sara was abducted in the “Kishna Pogrom” in 1903. Hanna never told Jacob the details, except to say that it was Eastertime and some of the local Christians spread word that Jews had used the blood of Christians to make matza. Whipping themselves into a drunken frenzy, the Cossacks went to the streets and destroyed every Jewish building and apartment in the city.

A year later, they were still at it. The government did nothing to prevent the attacks. It was later estimated that 60,000 Jews died in that pogrom. Although her aunt's husband was killed in the pogrom, her son and daughter survived, only to be sent away with a trainload of Jews in 1915. They were never seen or heard from again. Her ravaged, blood-covered body was found two months later, almost unrecognizable. After being raped dozens of times, she had bled to death from a severely torn uterus. Some people whispered that when they were done with her, they used some sort of tool to rip her uterus into pieces. Jacob wondered how humans could do such things to each other. To the Russian Cossack criminals, these were simple games of amusement. To them, the life of a Jew was cheap.

One such maddening mindless rampage through Hanna's village occurred just before Easter in 1915, when Hanna was seven years old. Hanna's father was away from the village searching for a better home for his family. That left Hanna, her mother and her four sisters in the house. Most of the men were out on a hunt.

The attack occurred on a perfect spring evening. It was warm, decidedly warm for so early in the spring. The sound of hundreds of chirping songbirds filled the air. A large wave of bird migration had followed the recent arrival of warm air and the little town was filled with birdsong. The birds competed intensely for juicy berries that hung from the local trees. The air was hauntingly still. Not a leaf was blowing in the trees. The large pond in the center of town reflected the huts, small homes and the handful of businesses that comprised this poor Jewish town. Frogs were beginning their nightly chorus. It was an idyllic setting.

The small, sleepy hamlet was about thirty miles southwest of Kiev. Its population consisted of twenty-seven families. Almost all of them were Jewish. Most of the families farmed small parcels of land, although Hanna's family lived closer to the town center, in a collection of small wooden buildings. They shared the pond with the rest of the town, which was abundant with perch, trout and bluegill. Homes were built in a large circle around the pond. This area housed the town's proprietors, including a banker, a bakery; two tailor shops, an ironsmith and a stable. There was also a very small wooden synagogue, next to the Rabbi's house. It was the cultural center of the village. The deepest track upon the road was near the little synagogue. The people of Koval were observant Jews. They lacked weapons, beyond hunting rifles. These people were totally peaceful and knew much more about books than guns.

Near sunset, a gentle breeze lifted the leaves on the trees surrounding Hanna's small house. Songbirds were beginning to settle in for the night. The

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nearby stream gurgled in the gathering dusk. Bullfrogs croaked their incessant nightly choir. Small spires of smoke rose over the chimneys of the ramshackle buildings. The sound of birds, frogs and insects suddenly stopped. The pounding of hoofbeats filled the air from the north. A fast-approaching evil had arrived. Mothers and children ran into their houses. The pounding of hoofbeats grew in strength until the reverberation seemed to shake the ground under Hanna's home. As the horses neared, the yelling and screaming of a large group of drunken men could be heard. They were swearing and seemed angry. More than twenty men of various ages comprised this terrible group. Their sole purpose was to destroy homes, kill the men, rape the women and steal their meager possessions. They spread out around the tiny village, smashing windows, looting stores and burning buildings. When they had taken everything of value that they could carry away from the stores, they moved toward the houses. Hanna and her family scurried to collect their valuables and go into their regular hiding place.

Since this was one of many raids upon the tiny village by Cossacks, most families had created hiding places for women and children. Sometimes it was a space inside the walls. Sometimes it was in an attic. For Hanna's family, it was in a food cellar, located underneath the kitchen floor. It was a tiny place, already filled with vegetables and canned food. They could just barely fit in, on top of the food supply. They entered through the trap door that was underneath a large rug in the kitchen. Hanna and her sisters now hurried into the damp, musty space below the floorboards of the kitchen. It was cramped, especially for five people and a baby. There was no room to stand. In fact, there was no room to walk bent forward. They had to crawl over and around the supplies, creating room for themselves quickly. Silently, they spread themselves out upon the soft wooden floor, among the various vegetables, fruit, canned food and firewood kindling.

The air was damp and pungent from the fruits and vegetables. Beams of late day sunlight slid through the slats of wood on the western side of the house. Hanna heard a tapping sound coming from under her legs. As she looked down, she noticed that her legs were shaking, causing her feet to hit against the floor. She pulled her legs underneath her to stop the sound. As twilight turned into darkness, they waited for evil to deliver its horrible punishment to their doorstep.

Soon they heard a faint scream in the blackness of the night. "It could be a bird," said Hanna's younger sister. Next, there was a sharp cracking sound, followed by more screaming. They all knew that it was a gun. Hanna stared at her sisters and her mother, who simply stared back with fearful expressions. "Mother, what are we supposed to do?" Hanna whispered. Her mother continued to stare with no apparent comprehension of the horror nearby. She was frozen with fear. Hanna's ten-month old sister, Liza, was now fussing in her mother's arms. Everyone stared at Liza. If she were to cry when the brutes were inside of their house, the baby would give away their position. If that happened, she thought, none of them would live to tell about it. Even her older sisters were frozen into silence.

Minutes later, the sound of horses arrived at the house next door. Hanna's friend Leah lived there. Although Leah was ten years older, they were close

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friends. They confided a great deal to each other. Someone was screaming. It was Leah's mother. Again, there was a sharp cracking sound. It was another gunshot, followed by more anguished screaming. This time, it was Leah's voice. Hanna could hear the Cossacks swearing, followed by banging and breaking in Leah's house. The invading men were exceedingly angry about something. She fought the urge to go to the window facing Leah's house. Behind her, Liza began to cry. Rather than comfort the child, her mother continued to stare into space. Hanna had never seen her mother panic in this way. She called to her. "Mama! Mama! What's wrong with you?" There was no response. Hanna's mother was in another world. Hanna looked at her sisters. None of them moved or spoke. They too were petrified. Meanwhile, there was another loud cracking sound, again followed by much hysterical screaming. One of the drunken men screamed loudly and began to issue threats.

Hanna could resist the temptation no longer. She started to climb back up into the house. Her sisters grabbed her arm. But Hanna's face was strained into a twisted caricature. "Don't go out," her oldest sister admonished in a hushed voice. But Hanna loved her friend Leah and nothing was going to stop her from helping. Opening the trap door, Hanna silently climbed into the kitchen and ran out to the rear porch. Looking to the left from her porch, Hanna saw smoke coming from Leah's house. It drifted out from all of the broken windows on that side of the house. There was more banging and screaming. Hanna was frozen with fear. She was desperate to help her friend. Yet, she understood that to intervene meant her own death. Suddenly, a young woman emerged from the back of the house. It was Leah.

Leah had just turned seventeen and Hanna admired her greatly as an older friend. She had recently become engaged to Adam Rosenberg, the grocer's son. The marriage had been arranged by their parents long ago. Still, they had been lifelong friends and both of them were excited about the upcoming marriage. Unfortunately, Adam was already dead. The same group of Cossacks had discovered him on the road to town. After taking turns with their knives, they left his bleeding carcass in the gully next to the road. And, there was no longer anyone to give the bride away. Leah's father lay dead on the kitchen floor. Most of his face had been destroyed by a point-blank shotgun blast. Leah's mother lay naked upon a disheveled bed. Her blood was everywhere. It had soaked the bed linens, forming a large, dark puddle on the wooden floor. The Cossacks had raped her repeatedly before they slit her throat. On the back steps now, Leah looked terrified. Her clothes were torn and it appeared that she had been beaten. She was wearing a torn white blouse with a dark skirt and no shoes.

Behind each of the homes on that side of the village was a dense forest. It could offer protection, especially for a child who had grown up there and knew the best hiding places. Leah ran toward the forest as quickly as possible, her dark hair and torn blouse flying behind in the breeze. Hanna thought momentarily that Leah resembled an angel in the night, with her torn white blouse floating like wings behind her shoulders as she ran. Leah ran with the desperation of someone who knows that she is about to die. Reaching the protection of the forest was her only hope.

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Suddenly, a large bear of a man with a long dark beard stumbled from the back of the house. He yelled something in Russian at Leah that Hanna could not understand. Most of the people that Hanna knew spoke Yiddish. But the brute screaming at Leah from the back of her house was speaking Russian. In a hushed voice, Hanna urged Leah on. "Run Leah! Run faster. You have to make it." She glanced back at Leah's house only to see that the man who had been screaming at Leah now had a rifle in his hands. He aimed at Leah. Hanna's heart was in her throat. She stifled her natural urge to scream. Covering her mouth with her hands, Hanna continued to urge Leah onward. "You're almost there, Leah! Run faster!" Indeed, Leah had almost reached the forest when Hanna heard a loud cracking sound. There was a simultaneous flash of light and puff of smoke from the man's gun.

The following moment would be burned into Hanna's memory forever. Leah, with her floating "angel" wings, had almost reached the edge of the forest. Suddenly, just a split-second before the gun's muzzle flash, she stopped and looked down at something and *smiled*. While she was looking down at the edge of the forest, the shot rang out. "Why did she stop and smile?" Hanna said to herself. She was totally perplexed. Her friend had arrived safely at the edge of the protection of the forest. Yet, she did not enter the forest at her desperate peril. *Why did she stop? She was almost inside the forest! What could have caused her to stop? Was she speaking to someone who was just inside the woods? How could anyone smile at a time like that?* And then a bullet tore through Leah's back, coming out through her chest. It tore a hole directly through her heart. Instantly, she fell, lifeless to the ground. Her eyes gazed blankly ahead. The corners of her mouth still curved upward in a smile.

Leah's motionless body lay only ten meters from the protection of the forest. The murderous Cossack belched loudly, wiped his mouth on his sleeve and walked back into the house. He was laughing. Hanna would never forget that harsh, cruel laughter. Leah's limp young body was still.

Just inside of the forest, beyond Hanna's view, a trembling eight-year-old boy named Moshe stood in front of Leah's body. He had been watching Leah as she ran out across her back yard towards his very own spot. Later, he would tell survivors that he escaped into the forest while his parents were being killed by the Cossacks. He could not comprehend why these terrible men were hurting them. He only understood that there was safety in the forest.

His name was Moshe Silverman. He was filthy and his clothes were torn. He had been standing in the forest waiting for his parents to come for him when he heard the commotion coming from Leah's house. His parents had told him about angels who live in heaven. When he saw her running behind her house, with floating wings of shimmering satiny white, he was drawn to the angel. And then, suddenly, the angel was shot and fell to the ground. The Cossacks would have killed him as well, if they had seen him hiding. Alone, and with no one to guide him, little Moshe stood mute before the body of this fallen angel. Her dying eyes stared at him. Blood came from her mouth and nostrils. Little Moshe was astonished when the young lady fell at his feet.

Just before she fell, the angel's expression had turned from fear to joy. In

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her last moment, she looked up at little Moshe and smiled. But what she whispered across the narrow grassy divide between hillside and forest made no sense. Gasping her final breath upon the damp grass, this angel said to Moshe, "Yours will save many."

Little Moshe stood there motionless for what seemed like hours. Finally the bad man went back into the house. Meanwhile, those four words burned themselves into his young mind. He told almost no one about it, since he was so confused. It made no sense to him as a child. Even as an adult, Moshe failed to comprehend the mystery of the floating angel and the words, "*Yours will save many.*" Only near his death, in his final moments, would he comprehend the message's significance.

Hanna, who had been transfixed upon the final earthly moments of her best friend, was petrified. She stood on the porch, mute. Suddenly, she heard her mother's voice from behind. "Get into the hiding space now!" Hanna's mother had apparently snapped out of her trance. She demanded that Hanna return to the cellar. Regaining her senses, Hanna ran back into the small, musty space as fast as she could. Her sisters begged her to tell what had happened. But, Hanna was mute. Her silence told all of them that Leah was dead. Their turn would be next.

The Cossacks entered Hanna's house through the rear porch door, which Hanna had left open upon her return to the cellar. Now, fear crawled up and down her spine as she could not recall whether she had pulled the cord that brought the kitchen rug back over the opening, covering the cellar below. Not being able to remember was torture to Hanna. In her mind, she continued to replay Leah's death.

All of the girls were now crying, making sobbing sounds in the crawl space. Above this, however was the constant muttering, calling and shouts of the men above. Hanna tried to keep her sisters quiet. The Cossacks walked back and forth, sending dust and pieces of dirt through the wooden slats over the girls' heads. Dust sparkled in the tiny shafts of light that fell through the floor. It looked like sparkling sand, floating through the damp cellar.

"Look for jewelry, gold, silver or money," growled one of the Cossack invaders, in a deep baritone voice. The men continued to stomp around above the trembling girls. They followed the footsteps from one room to the next. "I found something" cried a man from Hanna's parents' bedroom. His voice sounded young. He was certainly much younger than the "baritone" Cossack. A million thoughts raced through Hanna's mind. *Did the young man's father take him along this time to show him how it's done? Will he be able to kill Jews on his own next time? And, will he then teach this to his own children?* The young man spoke again. "I've got some rings, a silver box and some gold coins here." He promptly walked back into the kitchen, where the older Cossack was emptying the cupboards by throwing the entire contents, including the only family's only set of china, on the floor.

"This is all crap," growled the baritone. "Let's see what you have," he demanded. After apparently surveying the contents of the younger terrorist's bounty, the baritone suddenly shouted in anger, "Where are the women and chil-

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dren?" He seemed to be in a frenzy. "Where are the damn Jewesses?" he cried over and over again. "I need to have another one," growled the baritone. "You want one too, don't you, son?" Hanna's mother winced and shuddered at this last remark. Baby Liza suddenly made a cooing sound in the secure arms of her mother. The girls froze. Hanna was certain that the terrible men heard it. How could they forget about the baby? Someone should have had her mouth covered!

Hanna and her sisters trembled. She whispered "Did they hear?" At the same time, the older man said, "What was that sound?"

The younger man replied, "I heard nothing, father."

The old man was not satisfied. "I'm telling you that I heard a sound."

The younger man said, "What kind of sound?"

The older man grew impatient and started to scream again. "It was a damned baby. That's what it was!"

The younger man replied in a meek voice. "I'm sorry father. I did not hear it."

Underneath the floor, little Liza stretched again and began to whimper. Hanna and her sisters shuddered and stared at the baby, aghast. Hanna's mother drew the baby close to her to muffle the sound.

"Wait," said the younger man. "I heard something that time." At the same moment, more men came into the house. Apparently, they had been through the village house by house and building by building. They had found many women and children – but few men.

Above the huddling girls, the men argued about whether they should leave the village, or if they thought additional searching would reveal any treasure. "There is nothing here for us," one of them said in an angry voice. "These people have no money or jewelry. Whoever told you that they were rich made it up! These people are as poor as the dirt they live upon." The man coughed and spat a prodigious amount of mucus, some of which fell through the cracks in the floorboard. Hanna watched a long string of silvery mucus that was caught in the light as it seeped down towards her outstretched leg. She slapped her hand across her mouth to stifle a scream. She moved her leg, to avoid the man's disgusting fluid. Her shoe made a noise on the dirt below. Her sister, Raisl – in reaction – shifted her leg, which bumped a large potato, which in turn fell from its perch atop a basket. Everyone gasped as the potato rotated through the air as it fell. In a flash, Hanna's hand whooshed into the air, catching the potato. It made a muffled slapping sound. They held their breath, waiting to see if they had been discovered. But the men continued talking, as if nothing had happened.

The Cossacks soon also discovered that there was very little money or valuable property in Hanna's house. The younger man started to speak. "But, father, what about the box that I found." This was followed by a loud slapping sound. Hanna heard the son whimper. "We found nothing," the father said, after he had slapped his son. Hanna understood. *He doesn't want the others to know about the box. He wants to keep it all for himself.* Fortunately, Hanna's mother made a habit of keeping most of her money in her dress. They had almost no jewelry. Hanna looked at her mother in the darkness. Only the whites of her eyes were visible. She gazed at her sisters in the darkness and could only see the

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whites of their eyes, blinking in the eerie darkness. She never felt more frightened than at that moment.

Among the potatoes, radishes, onions and canned fruit, Hanna was about to discover if she would live or die. Her heart raced. She thought about how her family had been poor. She always felt bad about not having many toys, like some of her city cousins had. And how she had wanted to have a kitten! She actually ran away from the house when her parents refused to allow her to keep a stray cat. She thought it was the end of the world. Losing that cat was terrible, she had thought. She almost laughed thinking about how naïve she had been. Now, scattered on the dirt floor of her cellar, with mother and sisters, feeling bad about a kitten was humorous. Suddenly, death was at her own doorstep. And, her life might end. *What I thought was important meant nothing. I was so stupid. The only thing that matters is the people that we love. Nothing else is important. Oh, Papa. Where are you?*

The girls gathered together, hugged and trembled, while their mother pushed baby Liza's face deeper into her abdomen, to stifle her sounds. The men above continued to argue. But unfortunately, Liza was ready for food when the Cossacks arrived. She had become restless and whimpered loudly. Hanna's mother now clamped down upon the child with an iron grip. Although she was only seven, Hanna knew that if the Cossacks found them, they would be tortured and perhaps killed. Although she did not exactly know what "rape" meant, she had a pretty good idea. When she saw the way her friend Leah's clothes were torn, Hanna fell into a deep despair. She understood that a man could do some very bad things to a woman or a girl. She had heard family members tell stories of it and it made her shudder.

Suddenly, there was no sound from above. The Cossacks were listening. Hanna's mother and her sisters fell totally silent. The Cossacks walked back and forth, but softly this time. Dust fell through the slits between the floorboards above. As the dust settled over Hanna, she suddenly needed to sneeze. The urge was overwhelming. She covered her face with her hands and turned the sneeze into a cough. Fortunately, a man spoke at the same time and her cough was lost in a vulgarity-laced conversation. Hanna heard the baritone grunt, "Look for a crawl space." She stopped breathing. Her heart pounded in her chest. *They will find us! They will kill us!* The men were looking for a doorway to the crawl space. They seemed to look everywhere. Yet, for some unknown reason, no one pulled up the rug in the kitchen. *I don't want to die! Mommy, I don't want to die! Make them go away!* Hanna's heart was pounding so hard that she was surprised the men above did not hear it.

Liza was very hungry now and would not take no for an answer. Hanna's mother tried to feed the baby from her breasts. However, she had stopped breastfeeding some months ago and there was simply nothing available for the baby. Poor little Liza tried to suckle, but the disastrous result only compounded her frustration. Hanna's mother covered the baby's mouth, yet muffled cries continued. Hanna gazed at her mother and saw an expression of horror that she would never be able to forget. With abject fear, Hanna's mother moved the baby between her ample breasts and bent forward as far as she could. She covered the

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baby's face entirely with her body. The crying became increasingly muffled. It soon stopped altogether. Finally, in total silence, Hanna and her sisters held their breath, waiting to discover if they would live or die.

In that surreal darkness of the cellar, horror ate its way into Hanna's psyche. She began to retreat into a small, safe place in her mind where men don't rape and murder innocent young women. It was a place where Leah was still alive and they were still close friends. The sun always shines brightly in that place. And, bad news never arrives. And, once again, Hanna was free to be a child again and think foolishly about the trappings of life that aren't really important. The birth of neurosis lies between fantasy and futility. Into the recesses of that small, dark and safe place, Hanna remained a safe child.

The Cossacks, having failed to discover the crawl space entrance, finally left the house, taking with them almost nothing of monetary value. They had broken every window and jar, leaving a curtain of broken glass under every footstep. In the kitchen, their food was smashed everywhere. The psychological damage was even more extensive. Hanna and her sisters left the crawl space and climbed up into the house again. They were numb from fear and shock. The sisters stood up and gazed at each other.

Hanna's mother suddenly uttered a brief scream and fainted. Hanna's older sister, Greta, grabbed the baby before she fell to the floor. But, Liza's frail body flopped back and forth unnaturally. Greta began to shake violently. Her wide-open eyes brimmed with tears. Her mouth made an "O" from fear and shock. Hanna watched helplessly as Greta held the infant out at arms length, like a doll that has become filthy. Greta offered the dead infant to each of Hanna sisters. No one would touch the body. When it was her turn, Hanna accepted the dead baby, as her sisters had hoped she would. She stared at the Liza's blank face. Her arms and legs wobbled out awkwardly. The poor baby's eyes were still open. Her complexion was stark white, while her lips were dark blue. Greta began to sob hysterically. Hanna retreated back into her secret place, where she remained for weeks.

Perhaps Hanna's mind was never the same after that event. To Jacob, it seemed that she had always carried a mental scar. She no longer trusted anyone, even her own family. It made her forever doubtful, fearful – sometimes to the point of paranoia. Perhaps true madness was never far from Hanna's tenuous hold upon reality. But, who could blame her for being neurotic after living through a particularly bad pogrom? She had survived the only way that she could.

Almost half the town population was dead. Seven men were among the dead, including twenty-seven-year-old Adam Rosenberg, Leah's fiancé. Nine women had been killed. Three additional women and two girls had been gang-raped and were severely beaten. They might or might not live. The survivors walked erratically around the decimated village, staring out at others as though in a dream. They had difficulty focusing their thoughts in the aftermath of disaster.

The Cossacks could come back at any time. They townspeople knew that they had to move. But, move where? They had heard that Jews were treated fairly to the west, in Austria, Poland, and in Hungary. With almost no money and almost no contacts, Hanna's family headed for Austria – by foot. They carried

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their possessions in a cart, pulled by Hanna's father, who returned just two days later. By then, the dead had already been buried. With a few meager possessions, Hanna and her remaining family left Russia in search of a safe home. They longed for a place where they could live in peace. Hanna's mother said they should move to some isolated place where Cossacks did not exist. In 1882, Salzburg seemed perfect. So, Hanna's family moved to the mountains of western Austria.

As a result of that terrible pogrom, Hanna and Moshe became close friends. A few years later, they were married. Some of the relatives spoke alarmingly of the fact that Hanna was three years older than Moshe. Still, they seemed very much in love. In 1918, the year of a terrifying influenza epidemic, they were married. But by 1935, anti-Semitism again reared its ugly head. By 1939, it was no longer safe to be a Jew in Salzburg, or any other German-held territory.

Chapter 6

The Synagogue Tragedy

January of 1940 was cold and snowy. Jacob awoke on a Saturday morning with a start. He was covered in sweat and trembling. The nightmare had come back. Just like the first time he had the nightmare, he was forced to burn the naked bodies of dead Jews. And, like the first dream, he was again killed at the end. As waves of fear washed over him, Jacob struggled to understand the meaning of this dreadful nightmare. An episode of intense chest pain interrupted his thoughts. *Can someone my age have a heart attack?* Jacob quickly got out of bed, washed and put on his new suit. He could not stop thinking about his appalling dream. While washing his face, Jacob noticed that his hands were still trembling. No dream was ever so realistic. He could still taste the sickly-sweet odor of burning flesh. It was at the back of his throat, reminding him of the terrifying experience.

Recently, many of the things happening to Jews in Austria seemed unreasonable. But this was 1940 and Jacob embraced everything that was modern, from airplanes and wireless communication to breathtaking medical breakthroughs. Yes, Germany was at war with almost every country in Europe. But, despite the chilling rumors that they had heard from travellers, most of Jacob's friends believed that the war would soon be over. Looking ahead to the 1940s, he felt like the most fortunate person on earth. Never mind that his father and many others in the leadership of the Jewish community of Salzburg heard horrible stories of "death camps" where Jews were forced to submit to torture, and forced labor. His parents continued to argue about moving out of Austria. They argued often about it in recent weeks. His mother, who felt that something terrible was about to happen to Jews in Europe, wanted to leave immediately. His father took a more pragmatic approach, favoring patience. "If it gets really bad for Jews, we can always move at a moment's notice," he said. But, Jacob was in love with Rachael and not much else in the world mattered to him. He did his best to bury thoughts of his horrific nightmare, hoping that it would never return. In secret, he wondered if it could eventually happen.

Jacob loved and respected his father beyond measure. They were as close as two people can be in life, sharing everything. Moshe began to take Jacob everywhere with him, even as a small child. They went on fishing and hunting trips into the mountains, to soccer games at the university, to the carnival and even to the hospital, as Moshe made rounds with his patients. There was nobody that Jacob loved as much as his father... until his friendship with Rachael turned

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into mature love.

Jacob now left his apartment building on Verdant Street with his parents in tow. The new snow was deep, fluffy and soft, drifting into curves and creating hills where it piled up against buildings and fences. Their feet made loud crunching sounds in the fresh snow with each step. Jacob's nose and cheeks were stung by the still howling wind. As Jacob's parents followed behind, their combined footsteps sounded like a percussion concert. For a long time, there was no conversation... just silence and the crunching of their boots in the new snow.

Hanna, who had seemed pensive throughout the morning, abruptly turned to Moshe with a sense of concern. "Moshe, did you go to the American consulate this week?"

Moshe looked nervously at Hanna and said nothing for a moment. Finally, he spoke in a soft, quiet voice. "Hanna, we have everything we could want here in Austria. Why would you want to move away from all of our friends? Besides, you know that I have a full practice here. Who would my patients turn to? And, I'm on staff at the hospital."

Upon hearing this, Hanna stopped and turned angrily towards Moshe. "The Nazis will not allow you to continue to work at the hospital Moshe. You know that."

Moshe looked down at his shoes, dejectedly. "Yes, my darling. I believe that you might be right about that. But how long do you think they can hold power? Besides, I cannot simply drop my patients. They rely on me for their health and medical care."

Hanna was not assuaged with his reasoning. Something deep inside commanded her to leave. She had never held such a dark feeling in her life. Something awful was about to happen and Hanna felt compelled to go as far away as possible – to some place that was safe for Jews. Yet, no such place existed.

Having overheard this conversation, Jacob now felt obliged to defend his father. "Mother, you worry too much. We Jews must always endure pogroms. Gentiles will never accept us. Father is right. Everything we have is here – our friends, our home, our community, our lives. These Nazis will eventually lose power and we will return to our old lives." Then, Jacob thought about his nightmare. *Could it have been a premonition? If my mother has premonitions, could I have inherited the same trait?* Perhaps, he realized, he was only supporting his father's position to make his other self feel better. In reality, he felt very uncomfortable about remaining.

Hanna suddenly turned to Moshe. She seemed truly shaken. Her face was ashen. For the first time that he could recall, Jacob's mother looked old. The lines around her eyes were deeper and she had dark circles under them. When she spoke to Moshe, her voice was low, almost a growl. "I've never told you this, and I will say it in front of Jacob. Something terrible is about to happen. I have never had such a feeling as I do now. I despair all of the time now. I tell you that the Nazis mean to kill all of us, Moshe! Hitler speaks of the Jews like we are cockroaches, to be exterminated. He tells the people that we are vermin and we should be destroyed. You see that Poland has fallen to the Germans in only a couple of months. What do you think will happen to the Polish Jews? You know

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that my sister lives in Krakow. Who will stop the Nazis from killing everyone there?" Hanna had become almost hysterical. Jacob understood that his mother was high-strung from her unusually difficult childhood. But now, her anxiety frightened him. Moshe put his arm around her and they stopped talking for a moment.

Jacob, Moshe and Hanna stood on the corner of Judengasse and Getreidegasse. They paused in the dim light of the cold morning, collecting their thoughts. Tiny snowflakes drifted in the eerie silence. Hanna finally broke the silence. Her voice was low and shaky. "Listen carefully to me. Some people in my family, but only a few, are said to have the ability to foresee the future. My Aunt Sara was one of them. She always could tell before something very bad would happen – like a pogrom. I've never spoken of this with you because, well, I thought you might find it... foolish." Hanna felt like looking down, but instead forced herself to look into the eyes of her husband and her son. These were the only two people in Hanna's life that she would die for. Nothing could be more important than their safety.

As she continued, she appeared suddenly calm, as though just getting these thoughts out in the open was a big step for her. "We *must* leave here, and not just Austria. We must leave Europe. Look how many Jewish families have left Europe in the past few years." She paused, giving Moshe and Jacob enough time to think about the accuracy of her statement. Their silence confirmed their acknowledgment. Indeed, a great many Jews had already left, many to Great Britain and to America. She continued, "I have never had a feeling like this in my life. Each morning I get up and all I can think of is getting out of here. Each day, this horrible feeling is with me, wherever I go. It's like someone is standing over me screaming." Tears welled up in her eyes and dripped down her cheeks. Jacob could almost taste the fear in her voice. "We are going to die if we do not leave this place!" She buried her face in Moshe's soft black overcoat. Jacob watched helplessly as his mother's body heaved and shuddered against his father. She cried for what seemed like ten or fifteen minutes. All the time, Moshe said nothing. He held Hanna tightly and allowed her to get the tears out of her system. As other people walked nearby, they stared at Hanna before they finally moved toward the synagogue.

Moshe and Jacob glanced at each other. Jacob had always known his mother to have a tenuous hold on reality. She was constantly nervous and exceedingly overprotective with him. It seemed to Jacob as though his mother was always on edge. Probably, this whole Nazi thing with Jews has set her off, Jacob thought. He started to say something, but suddenly held back. He remembered his nightmare. It was so fresh in his memory that he could still smell the burning flesh from the crematoria. *Should I tell my parents about the nightmare?* He shivered, as a chill went up his spine. *Can she be right about the Nazis? Would they actually round up and kill Jews? If she is right, then the dream could come true! Could people do such things to Jews?* Jacob stared up at his father. Moshe looked down at him with a sad expression. *Father, tell us it won't happen!*

Moshe looked down lovingly at Hanna and wiped her tears away with his soft black glove. He was in doubt about her "premonition" concerning the Nazis.

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Yet, Moshe admitted that life could become difficult for Jews in Europe. For the first time, Moshe began to accept that these Nazis could get out of hand. *Hitler does have passionate feelings about Jews. But would he commit genocide? Would the world allow him to get away with it? Certainly, the world would be more civilized than that!* But, the most important thing in his life was his family. *What if Hanna is right and I do nothing? What if there is some way to protect my family and I fail to use it? What kind of father would do such a thing?* “All right, Hanna. I will go to the American consulate on Monday. Will that do?” Hanna looked into Moshe’s eyes and smiled. He wiped away the rest of her tears and the Silverman family finally reached the synagogue.

As they walked up the synagogue steps, Jacob’s thoughts were dark. *What if Nazis really do mean to “eliminate” Jews from Europe? It took them less than two months to conquer Poland this year. The Nazis took Austria without firing a shot. They have already separated Jews from gentiles and forced us to live in ghettos. There is talk about preventing Jewish doctors from practicing medicine in Austrian hospitals!* The fact that his father was still practicing at the Salzburg hospital was an exception to the rule. *And, how long would that last?* The Nazis were forcing Jewish professors and teachers out of public schools and universities. *Will I be allowed to study medicine in Vienna, as I have planned?* Suddenly, Jacob began to see the world as it was, not as he wanted to see it.

There was one small, wooden synagogue in the Jewish ghetto of Salzburg. It was a few blocks from Jacob’s house. The aged wooden structure now loomed in front of them. Soon, the sounds of many footsteps and muted conversations arrived, as they climbed the synagogue steps on Brodgasse Street. “Wait for us” he heard his father say behind him.

They entered the synagogue together, hung their coats on hooks near the entrance, put on their yarmulkes and prayer shawls, and walked into the spacious sanctuary. All of the chandeliers were lit for the Sabbath service. Jacob and his father sat together near the front of the lower level. They were close to the *bimah*, where the Torah and the Holy Scriptures were housed. Little more than a highly polished wooden cabinet, it was the visual focal point of the sanctuary. All seats pointed towards the *bimah*. Jacob’s mother, along with Rachael and her sister, sat upstairs in the balcony – in the section of seats overlooking the synagogue below. Rachael was already there, with her father and sister. Jacob looked up at her and winked. She smiled down at Jacob, her long dark hair shimmering in the sanctuary’s bright lights. Jacob could never understand why men and women had to sit separately in the synagogue. Even after listening to the Rabbi explain why this was necessary; he still felt it to be wrong. However, she would see him participating in the service, and that thought warmed his heart.

The Sabbath service began with the usual prayers in Hebrew. With each passing moment, Jacob became increasingly nervous. He was to read from the Torah during the service. It was the anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah. Many of Jacob’s friends and relatives told him that they planned to attend services in his honor. Some were not even Jewish. Although Jacob had memorized his Torah readings four years ago, additional practice with the Rabbi had been required. Stage fright had taken over and he was beginning to perspire. He began to dread

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the arrival of his part. Shortly before Jacob was to be called up to read the Torah, he glanced behind. He was in shock. The synagogue was completely filled. Jacob assumed that the bad weather would keep most of his friends and relatives at home. Instead, he saw a full sanctuary. There was hardly an empty seat. Jacob was so stunned by this huge mass of people that his heart almost jumped out of his chest. *I should have known this would happen. Father is so well known and well-liked. Many of these people are here for him, as well as for me.* Ariel Goldberg, Rachael's father took a seat next to Moshe.

Rachael Goldberg sat next to Hanna Silverman. Anna, her little sister, was at her side. Rachael wore a beautiful white dress with fold and after fold of shimmering velvet, cascading to the floor. Her shiny black hair fell down upon her shoulders, like an ebony waterfall on top of a white, iridescent mountain. There was a soft hissing sound coming from the balcony where dozens of women chattered away in the old synagogue. The gentle sound came from the whispered voices of women exchanging gossip. None of the diminutive voices could be individually heard. Instead their cumulative intonations created the gentle hissing sound. Anna fidgeted, pulling upon Rachael for attention. But, Rachael Goldberg spoke with no one on this cold, snowy Saturday morning. She paid rapt attention to the one person whose love meant more to her than anything. Each time that Jacob turned and looked up was a moment to be savored.

The Rabbi called, "Jacob, son of Moshe" to read this day's portion of the Torah. Jacob looked at his father with a strange combination of feelings, but mostly with endless love and admiration. Dr. Moshe Silverman held his son close for a moment, gently kissed his cheek and then told Jacob to take several deep breaths. As always, Jacob's father knew exactly what to do. Looking into his father's bright blue eyes, Jacob smiled. *Father, I love you so much.* His father was the most kind, gentle and caring person that he had known. It seemed that everyone agreed about that. He was a skilled physician, but he was also beloved by many. Slowly, Jacob walked from his seat in the center of the synagogue to the aisle. All eyes were upon him, as he was the first representative of the Hebrew tribes to be called to read from the Torah. Jacob's tribe was called the "Cohanim." They have been the high priests of Judaism from the time of Moses. Jacob was proud that he belonged to the priests of his religion. To him, it meant added responsibility. Jacob had always harbored the belief that it was his duty to give to his community, in whatever way was appropriate. Now, Jacob felt obliged more than ever to serve. He closed his eyes for a moment. In the warm darkness, he took in three large gasps of breath, holding each for several seconds. The deep breaths helped to ease his anxiety. As Jacob approached the Torah, he felt more relaxed.

Jacob paused for a moment at the edge of the steps leading to the bimah. He gazed at the Ark where the congregation's two beloved Torahs were kept. The doors were now spread wide open. The Rabbi and Cantor each took a Torah out from the ark, holding it so that the congregation could see the front coverings. The Torahs were wrapped in dark red velvet, with shining silver plates covering the front. Large wooden handles that control movement of the scroll extended above and below the velvet covering. One Torah was smaller and older than the

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other. It had been used for almost two hundred years and many of the sections had been repaired. But, Torahs were very expensive and few congregations could afford a new one. To Jacob, they both looked elegant, as he walked up the steps to the bimah. Jacob's heart filled with joy as he rejoiced in taking part in the Sabbath service. Here, in these two Torahs, were the laws handed down to the Jewish people through Moses at Mount Sinai. *Honoring the Sabbath is the pure essence of Judaism. The Torah tells us how to be a good person. Could there be a more important book?* Before beginning to chant, Jacob turned to look at the congregation. He saw his parents, his father below and his mother in the balcony. They were smiling at him warmly. But it was Rachael's smile that filled Jacob's heart with the greatest joy. His heart was still pounding, but he began chanting from the Torah with confidence.

For almost five minutes, Jacob chanted from the Torah, as he had been trained to do at age thirteen, more than four years earlier, when he was a Bar Mitzvah. His nervousness faded away while the Hebrew letters floated past in the large scroll. He used a long, silver pointing device with a tiny metal hand at the end to keep his place. The tiny metal hand's index finger skipped along from word to word, pausing on words that required a longer chant. Once again, he was thirteen. Everything came back to him. Jacob was one with all of the Jewish people – his extended family over more than three thousand years. And, he wanted to chant perfectly for his father, whom he respected more than anyone.

Just as Jacob completed his Torah reading, in the total stillness of the crowded synagogue, faint voices and a commotion could be heard outside. Jacob thought that he heard people chanting. It sounded like "All Jews must die." Suddenly, there was a crashing of broken glass followed by a deafening explosion. Thick black smoke quickly filled the sanctuary. What followed could only be described as mass hysteria. Women and children were screaming, some with blood dripping across their faces. Everyone ran towards the main doorway. Jacob inhaled the thick, acrid smoke as he raced to be with his father. He choked on it and began to cough. *It burns my lungs! It burns so much!* Some elderly worshippers seemed unable to move. They stood in front of their seats, like visitors to a strange museum. Others fell to the floor. Jacob watched in horror as people in the aisle were trampled under the rushing crowd. Jacob's lungs now hurt horribly. He coughed hard after each breath. His throat screamed with pain. In the background he could hear men yelling to "save the Torahs."

Jacob finally reached his father and together they moved into the aisle, heading towards the open synagogue doors. "Cover your mouth with your handkerchief," his father screamed at him. Each breath now felt like a streak of fire, burning his throat and lungs. Jacob noticed that everyone around him had black marks on their upper lips and around their mouths. At first it looked almost comical, as though they had used dark makeup to paint a mustache, like a minstrel performer. Then, Jacob realized that it was due to the smoke exhaled from their lungs. "Hurry!" screamed Moshe. Everyone was pushing the person in front of them. It was pure panic and pandemonium. The thin white curtains that covered the broken stained-glass windows were on fire. Flames danced up the walls, pushed by wind entering through the windows.

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Jacob was pushed by someone behind into the aisle. He, in turn, pushed the person in front. After about a minute, something very strange happened. There was something soft underneath his feet. *What is soft?* He had trouble maintaining balance because of the soft floor. Jacob discovered that he had now lost control of his own movement. Everyone in the aisle was pushing so hard towards the sanctuary doors, but the capacity of escape through the doorways was insufficient. In this panic, the congregation was completely out of control. Jacob had lost his father's hand and began to call for him. "Father! Where are you?" Jacob turned and could no longer see his father behind him. This must be a dream, Jacob thought. *This can't be happening!* The sanctuary was now very hot, as flames raced across the huge room. Stuck in the center of this horrified crowd, Jacob began to pray. He could do nothing but push, along with everyone else. He, and the others around him, drifted slowly towards the foyer and the doorway. *But, the floor is so soft!* It felt as though he was walking on pillows. He tried to look down, but smoke obscured the floor. *Why would the floor be soft? Are there cushions on the floor of the synagogue? If so, where did they come from?*

As Jacob moved closer to the foyer, he again heard the people yelling outside. The group was shrilly chanting "*Jews must die, Jews must die, Jews must die!*" While Jacob had heard Nazi propaganda against Jews for the past three or four years, and he had been beaten for being Jewish, he never thought anyone would actually *do* something like this. He thought it was simply government-sponsored propaganda, to distract people's fears about the war. He was amazed that anyone in his sleepy, remote hometown would actually take such drastic action against its small, innocent Jewish population.

The curtains around the windows were now totally engulfed in flames. The wind-whipped fire made a growling sound as it burned against the walls. The burning curtains resembled the angry wings of some huge evil raptor, flapping toward the ceiling, with smoke curling around the edges of flame. "Save the Torahs, save the Torahs," Jacob heard from behind. People everywhere were screaming and pushing. Looking back, Jacob could see that the Rabbi and the Cantor had grabbed the synagogue's two Torahs, holding them high as they ran to an exit. His last view of the sanctuary revealed flames and smoke everywhere. *God help those poor people behind me.*

The fire swept quickly up the wall to the balcony, upstairs. Suddenly, Jacob realized that his mother and Rachael could be in trouble. Unfortunately, the smoke was so thick that he could not see more than a few feet in any direction. Jacob could no longer move independently among the mass of flowing humanity. He trod on the pillows as long as he could, moving step-by-step closer to the doorway. All the while, he was mystified by the sudden appearance of the pillows. He could not comprehend where they had come from and how they all ended up in the aisle. Everyone was coughing and screaming. He thought, for a moment, that he heard some people screaming from *underneath* him. He dismissed the thought as unrealistic.

As the flames crept up the wall behind him, Jacob neared the doorway. His throat was burning intolerably. He was coughing very hard and beginning to get

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dizzy. As Jacob gazed at the faces around him, he again noticed that dark stain below their nostrils and around their mouths. They resembled ghosts as they scrambled towards the exit. It was now almost impossible for Jacob to keep his balance. The “pillows” on the floor were sometimes more flat and hard and sometimes much more rounded and full. Suddenly, one of them seemed to *shift* under his feet. *How can a pillow move on its own?* He was very dizzy now, as the room swirled around his head. Sounds began to diminish. His vision was pale and blurry. Suddenly, he lost his balance and fell to the floor. Just as he was about to hit the floor, a very large shoe kicked Jacob squarely on the front of his forehead.

Darkness began to consume Jacob's limited vision and the sights and sounds of the burning synagogue started to fade away. From the floor, Jacob could now look back, into the main sanctuary. It was completely filled with smoke and flames. He looked down to see the pillows and was shocked to discover that he had been very wrong. They were not pillows at all. They were *people!* He had been literally walking on *people!* Those who were unable to walk quickly enough to the exits, mostly the elderly and small children, fell to the floor and were trampled to death by the stronger members of the congregation. To his right, Jacob saw a baby on the floor. The child could not have been more than a year old. Its lifeless eyes stared blankly at the ceiling of the smoky sanctuary. To his left lay a motionless old woman. She stared right through Jacob. Then, he saw something so remarkable that it would haunt his dreams forever. As Jacob looked into the old woman's eyes, he saw the irises of both eyes expand in unison – until blackness covered the entire iris. No color remained. Jacob remembered his father telling him that one sign of brain death is dilation of the eyes. As terrifying as it was to watch someone die inches away from him, Jacob now realized that he too had been trampling people to death. The thought made Jacob feel sick and very guilty.

Some of the poor suffering people on the floor in the aisle way were unconscious. Others were moaning in pain and crying. Some shouted for relatives to rescue them. He noticed that they too had dark stains around their lips and mouths. Jacob looked to his left and saw a young woman holding a baby in her arms on the floor. She was beautiful, with long flowing curly brown hair, contrasting against her long white dress. They had both been trampled and were unconscious. The baby's skull was caved in on one side, just above its right eye. Bright red blood dripped down the side of the baby's pale white face. It made a puddle on its mother's forearm. The mother's head was hanging on her shoulder in an unnatural way. *Her neck is broken!* In this incredible moment of horror and guilt, Jacob slipped into darkness.

Hanna and Rachael were in a panic, searching for Jacob and Moshe. They rushed in and out of the synagogue, to no avail. Outside, rocks and broken bottles were being thrown at them. Rachael turned and saw the men and boys chanting and throwing objects at the Jews as they escaped from the burning synagogue. She was furious. *It is not enough that they burn Jews inside the synagogue. They have to also try to kill us as we escape!* Rachael saw Hanna try to help a thin old man get up from the ground on the steps of the synagogue. Just as the old

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man was able to stand up, one of the rock throwers arrived with a huge chunk of concrete. He raised it and then slammed the concrete upon the poor old man's head. The old man crumpled as his head disintegrated into a bloody pulp. Blood spurted out of the injury and the old man's skull opened up. Hanna was suddenly drenched with blood. The old man's eyes rolled up into his head, as he crumpled to the ground in a heap. Hanna stared at the young man who had just killed this poor, innocent old man. He was quite young, probably in his teens. He wore black clothing, with a swastika armband. The man's eyes were wide open in fury. A large grin covered his face. He taunted the old man's inert body. Hanna stared at this evil man with hatred. But her mind was hundreds of miles away. She was lost in her childhood house, hiding from the Cossacks. As the man with the armband walked away, Rachael raced to Hanna. Covered with blood, Hanna trembled in her arms.

Looking up at the synagogue from the street below, Rachael saw a flood of people rushing out of the burning building. Some of the men wore burning prayer shawls as they escaped. Hanna noticed that their white and blue prayer shawls caught the wind and flew out behind them – giving them the appearance of angels. It was a surreal experience as she recalled how her childhood friend, Leah, resembled an angel moments before her death at the hands of Cossacks. Hanna shivered and blinked her eyes. To Rachael, she had the appearance of someone who refused to accept what her eyes revealed as reality.

After several minutes, Moshe stumbled out of the front of the synagogue. Rachael raced to him and pulled him to safety. With Moshe at her side, Hanna returned from her childhood. Her eyes again focused upon reality. They kissed for a moment. Then Hanna screamed, "Where is Jacob?" She looked at Rachael. Their frightened eyes met. Suddenly Rachael ran back into the synagogue. Hanna and Moshe screamed at Rachael to stop. Moshe was too badly injured to stand up, much less pull Rachael from the synagogue. But as Moshe looked from the sidewalk up to the front doors of the synagogue, he saw the men who looked like angels. For the second time in his life, Moshe saw what appeared to be an angel. He shook his head vigorously, trying to clear it. Suddenly, he wished that he had found a way to take his family away from this growing danger. Now, he prayed that his son was still alive.

Inside the large foyer of the burning synagogue, Rachael choked on the acrid smoke. She tore a piece of her dress off and used it to cover her mouth and nose. She was now fighting against the flow of people still exiting the burning structure. She pushed, shoved, and screamed at people to get out of the way. *Jacob, I'm coming for you! Stay alive!* People rushing to escape the flames twice knocked her to the floor. When she was finally able to get to her feet again, she saw Jacob on the floor. He was lying in the doorway of the main sanctuary, apparently unconscious. Then, Rachael saw something that she would never be able to forget. Flames flickered just behind Jacob. As she moved closer, she saw that everything behind Jacob was on fire – including people on the floor. For the first time, Rachael smelled the sickly-sweet odor of burning flesh – the same terrible odor that Jacob experienced in his nightmare. *Am I too late?* Her stomach cramped and its contents were ejected. *Oh my God! Not Jacob!*

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Rachael saw only walls of flame inside the burning synagogue. The heat of the fire was overwhelming. Embers of flame flew everywhere. She was certain that everyone behind Jacob was dead. As she looked down, she saw the baby that lay upon the floor near Jacob's face. The child's face was on fire. She screamed and looked away, retching again. But, she was not about to surrender. Rachael bent forward and grasped Jacob's hand. She pulled with all of her might. But Jacob didn't budge. She was simply unable to pull his weight. She bent over again and tried to pull Jacob out of the fire. Again, he was too heavy. Suddenly, she noticed that the bottom of Jacob's trousers were on fire. She smothered the fire on his legs with her dress. She was suddenly gripped by a fear she had not known possible. With her beloved on fire, and unable to move him away, Rachael screamed at the top of her smoke-filled lungs. "Help us! Please, someone help us!" She swiveled and looked around for help. All that she could see was smoke and fire. Was she the last person alive inside? "Help me! Please help me!" Rachael continued to scream. Finally, she grabbed Jacob's face and screamed at him. "Jacob! Jacob, get up! Get up!" But Jacob remained unconscious. And the synagogue continued to burn around them.

Finally, Rachael decided that she would rather die than live without Jacob. After one last scream for help, she lay down next to Jacob and put her arm around his shoulder. She kissed his cheek and told him how much she loved him. "Jacob, I cannot live without you. You are my life. I will die with you!" Then her dress finally caught fire. All that was left for her to do was to pray.

Suddenly, something covered her, blocking the light. She opened her eyes and saw that she was covered by the magenta velvet drapes that enclosed the alcove where the Torahs were kept. She was very confused. *Is this how God accepts us when we die?* Then, she heard a familiar voice. Someone was telling her to get up. Finally, someone grabbed her by the arms and stood her up. She turned around and saw Hershel, Jacob's classmate. They often walked home from school together, she recalled. He was speaking to her. But the roar of the fire was deafening and she couldn't hear him. Hershel moved closer and yelled into her ear, "Get out! Don't worry about Jacob." With that, Hershel bent down and pulled Jacob up, over his shoulders and onto his back. Hershel looked up at Rachael and screamed at her again. "Get out of here, now!" The tall, thin young man wavered on his feet, trying to balance Jacob on his back. He regained his balance, stumbled through the foyer and finally walked out onto the front steps of the synagogue. Rachael followed close behind.

As Hershel emerged from the synagogue with Jacob upon his back, rocks, bottles and all kinds of objects were thrown at them from the angry crowd. "Go back inside and die, you stupid worthless Jews!" they yelled. "Die Jews. We hate you!"

Rachael watched helplessly as an older boy threw a brick at Hershel. It struck him on the side of his face, producing a torrent of blood. Hershel's white and blue prayer shawl was soon covered with blood. But he refused to drop Jacob. He recalled how Jacob had once saved his close friend, Saul, from being beaten by a Nazi youth while walking home from school. Now, it was Hershel's turn to save Jacob and he would not be deterred. More rocks and bottles flew in

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their direction. Rachael covered Jacob's head with her arm. Something hard crashed into her back. She stumbled and then fell down the steps leading to the street. Someone grabbed her arms and pulled her to safety. It was Moshe. They ran into the street and joined a large group of people who managed to escape the flames and smoke. Hershel carried Jacob to the street and gently placed him on the ground next to Rachael and Jacob's parents. Rachael stood up and hugged Hershel. "Thank you for saving Jacob," she whispered in relief.

More rocks, bricks and bottles flew into the crowd of Jews on the street, as they watched their beloved synagogue burn to the ground. The chanting continued. "*No more Jews! No more Jews! No more Jews! No more Jews!*" The hair on the back of Rachael's neck stood up as she listened to the hateful onlookers. She strained to see the perpetrators of this heinous crime. There were perhaps a dozen young men and boys wearing black clothing and swastikas – still chanting. Some of the younger boys wore the familiar brown shirts of the Hitler Youth. These were the people who were responsible for so much death and injury. Their faces were contorted with hate. They sneered at the group of terrified Jews. It was then that Rachael noticed a much larger group of men behind the onlookers with swastikas. They too stared at the Jews, now huddled together in front of their burning sanctuary. They were average Austrians, out for a walk on a snowy Saturday morning. There was no sympathy in their eyes either. Apparently, they too wanted the Jews to go.

Behind her, Rachael heard a great moaning coming from the burning synagogue. It was the sound of huge wooden timbers buckling together at the same time. Suddenly, the roof of the structure caved in, with a tremendous crash. Flames shot up into the wintry sky. And the Austrian crowd behind the Jews cheered. For the first time, Rachael realized how much hatred people had for Jews. Although only one or two-dozen men had started the fire and were now throwing objects at the Jews, it seemed that every onlooker cheered the destruction of the synagogue. She saw smiles upon the faces of the gentile observers. *Oh, dear sweet God. They want us dead! A chill went up and down her spine with the realization that so many people hated her. They don't even know me! How can they hate someone that they don't know?* As she slumped down next to Jacob, she heard one of the smiling faces say, "This is only the beginning."

Chapter 7

The Hospital

Jacob awoke with the most powerful headache he had ever experienced. Each time he opened his eyes the light scalded his brain. It felt as though his head would explode. His next awareness was the tenderness in his chest and throat. Each breath was a painful experience. *The room lights are too bright.* There were many voices around him, mostly those of young people in pain. Between the groaning and moaning, however, one distinct young voice was next to him on his left. “So, the Jew-boy is awake.”

Jacob immediately recognized that the voice came from Heinrich Schmidt, a very large and foreboding eighteen-year-old from the public school outside Jacob’s ghetto. Jacob recalled with some trepidation that Heinrich had washed Jacob’s face with snow on several occasions. Each time, it seemed, Heinrich’s rationale was that “kikes must be punished.”

As the clouds in Jacob’s mind cleared he realized that he was in Salzburg’s only hospital. His bed was near the inside wall of a room containing five other beds, each occupied by a person under eighteen. Across the room, near the window, was a boy who seemed to be sleeping. Next to that boy was a boy, perhaps twelve, who cried constantly. “What’s wrong with him?” asked Jacob.

“What’s wrong with you, other than being a filthy kike?” replied Heinrich. He then informed Jacob that the boy in the middle was recovering from surgery on both eyes. “He did something patriotic. He burned some Jew-vermin away from our great Aryan society,” offered Heinrich with a sense of great pride.

A nearby nurse overheard the comment. Her lips formed a silent “O.” Jacob looked at her and their eyes locked. The nurse looked at Heinrich and then looked back to Jacob. She seemed ready to say something and then abruptly stopped and returned to the nurses’ station.

Heinrich continued his sadistic commentary. “Yes, that loyal Aryan youth burned Jews right in their own church!” With the tacit approval of the nurse, Heinrich began to lambaste Jacob with every filthy lie he could muster. Jacob thought Heinrich’s smile to be the most sickening thing he had ever seen. The realization that a young man in his own hospital room had participated in burning the synagogue infuriated him. *Was Heinrich involved too?*

As though reading Jacob’s mind, Heinrich said, “Unfortunately, I arrived there too late.” He continued to leer at Jacob, even when Jacob turned away, with burning eyes and a sly grin.

Heinrich’s smile disappeared when Jacob’s father entered the room. Moshe Silverman smiled warmly as he sat down next to Jacob. He kissed Jacob’s head gently. Moshe often wondered if he devoted too much attention to Jacob. After all, a young man must learn to make his way in life. He thought about his own childhood. He was not much more than a toddler when his parents were killed in

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a Cossack pogrom. His life was always hard. He had to fight for every scrap of success, finally elevating to medical school. Moshe's difficult trek through life had weakened his heart at an early age. Now, just sixty-two-years-old, he looked at least seventy-two. He smoked cigarettes all the time, giving himself the gift of perpetual bronchitis. His short, silvery hair glistened underneath the harsh hospital lights. *My son... how I love you! You are everything to me. I love you more than life itself. But, I am now afraid for your safety. Dear God, how can I protect my family?* Moshe walked directly into his role as a passionate father. But, today he was also his son's physician and he began to examine Jacob with great care. However, Jacob could tell that something was wrong. His father was holding something back.

Moshe stayed with Hanna's family for several years after the Pogrom that killed his family. Over time, he grew to love Hanna. However, Moshe had a passion to become a physician. He left the village and entered the University of Leipzig. He worked every day building a railroad line to pay for school. He even sold his own blood to pay for food. Finally he graduated and was then admitted to medical school at the University of Dresden, where he also completed an internship in surgery. But Moshe never forgot his attachment to Hanna. Whenever possible, he had gone back to the village to see her. They corresponded regularly. Finally, when Moshe completed medical school, they were married. They moved to Salzburg in late 1925, where Moshe was given a staff position at the hospital.

Now, almost fifteen years later, the hospital felt like home to Moshe. He had taken on a private practice and over the years his reputation as a skilled physician was recognized throughout the community. He treated hundreds of patients from the entire region, including many gentiles. Four years ago, Moshe was made chief of staff at the hospital. Everyone agreed that Moshe had a very pleasant and giving personality. He admired and respected everyone, never prejudging a person for any reason. People were attracted to Moshe and had no inhibitions with him. Soon, Moshe began to see patients who were not physically ill, but had mental or emotional problems. Although he was not formally trained in psychiatry, his gentle personality and analytical skills made him very effective. Moshe had become the most skilled physician in the region and had gained the respect of everyone... except the Germans, who now controlled Austria. To them, he was nothing more than a pest to be eliminated. He was a non-person. To some, it was an abomination that he treated Aryans.

Moshe glanced at Heinrich, in the next bed and smiled. "Hello young man. How are you feeling today?" asked Moshe.

Heinrich glowered fiercely at Moshe in silence. His nostrils flared and his mouth turned into a frown. He bared his teeth, like a wild dog ready to attack. Under his breath, Heinrich muttered "stinking Jew-doctor."

Moshe moved closer to Jacob and quietly told him that ten people had died in the synagogue fire, with another eight casualties at the hospital. Of those eight, it appeared that only two or three would live beyond the night. "But Jacob," he said with a firm voice. "Mother is fine. And, Rachael and her family are fine." Jacob silently thanked God that his family was safe and unharmed. But, he could

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not forget the image of the woman and her baby, lying dead on the floor of the burning synagogue. *They were there to celebrate the Sabbath. Now, because of a hatred I cannot comprehend, they are dead. The baby will have no childhood friends or memories and no bar mitzvah. He will never grow up or fall in love. He will never see the Eiffel Tower or sip champagne to toast the birth of his own son. He will never grow old and have lasting friendships and grandchildren. And, why? Why? Why?* Heinrich chuckled in the next bed.

Moshe told Jacob how Rachael had gone back into the burning building to save him and how Hershel had carried him out to safety. His mother and Rachael were safe and at home. Moshe told Jacob that he was fine now, but that he was arranging to have Jacob remain in the hospital for precautionary reasons.

Suddenly, Dr. Holst, the hospital administrator, entered the room. He looked nervously at Jacob before whispering "Moshe, I need to speak with you right away." His face was pale and his mouth formed an unrelenting frown. Something was clearly wrong. Although they were just outside the room, Jacob could hear most of the conversation. Dr. Holst was talking to Moshe in a firm but quiet manner.

"I'm sorry Moshe, but your son must leave," whispered Holst. Moshe stared at Holst, struggling to comprehend. "A Gestapo officer was here today, Moshe. He informed me that Jews will no longer be served at this hospital." Holst looked down at the floor and continued in a sarcastic tone. "The glorious leaders of the Weimar Republic have ordained that all public hospitals become *Judenrein* (cleansed of Jews)."

Moshe was stunned. The hospital that had benefited so much from his own hard work was now rejecting his son in his time of need. "What do you mean, he can't stay?" said Moshe, now speaking in a hoarse voice. Several nurses looked up and stared at the two doctors. "I've been on staff in this hospital for almost twenty years." Moshe's voice continued to rise. Jacob had never seen his father angry like this." Moshe struggled to control his anger. He had not felt so violated since he lost his parents. *How dare they evict my beloved son – and just because he's a Jew!* "I was chief of staff of this hospital," thundered Moshe to a now red-faced Dr. Holst. Moshe argued vociferously for several minutes with Dr. Holst, but to no avail. Holst indicated that it was also the decision of the hospital board.

Moshe exploded in anger. "The Board agrees? They have all known me for years! I have treated their family members!" As Moshe was about to continue, Holst turned around quickly, walked several steps and abruptly turned around.

"There's something else, Dr. Silverman." Holst's eyes were now far away. Drawing a deep breath, he continued. "Moshe, the Gestapo told us that you may no longer practice medicine here." Holst understood that his words were a stunning punishment to Moshe. But, good bedside manner was not among Holst's skills. He felt sorry for Moshe, but he feared the Gestapo. They had threatened to imprison him if he did not remove every Jewish patient, physician, nurse or janitor at the hospital. "I'm very sorry." Holst turned and walked rapidly down the hallway, with his long white coat flying behind him.

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Moshe looked down at the floor. *They took away my job? I can no longer work here? I cannot treat a gentile?* Moshe was completely bewildered. He thought about all of the warning signals that he summarily dismissed as irrelevant or ignored. He thought about how most of his friends, doctors and other professionals, had also lost their jobs. Still, he had persisted in believing that it would never happen to him. He convinced himself that the danger was not real. He never really believed that it would happen to his family. *Why did I wait so long to leave? Was I blinded by the love for my work here? What have I done to my family? How could I not see this coming?* Moshe fought tears as he thought about how many times Hanna had asked him to leave. *She was right. I was a blind fool. We should have left here years ago. Oh, my beloved, how I have failed you!* He ran his hand across his puffy, wide face, deep in thought. *What can I do now? How can I save my family?*

When Moshe returned to Jacob's bed, he was visibly disturbed. It was the first time that Jacob had seen his father shaking with anger. His hands trembled as he took Jacob's blood pressure. In silence, he used his stethoscope to examine Jacob's heart and lungs. He began to say something, and then suddenly stopped, as though his words must now be very carefully chosen. When he spoke, his voice was very low and barely audible. "I'm sorry Jacob, but you must continue your recovery at home."

Jacob suddenly put his arms around his father. "I know father. Don't worry. I will be fine." Jacob held his father tightly. He understood how important being a physician was to his father and how ghastly it must feel to have been removed from the staff for being Jewish. All Jacob could do was to hold Moshe tightly and repeat, "I know father," over and over again. "It's all right, father. We'll start over somewhere else."

Moshe pulled his head back to see Jacob's face. He kissed Jacob's forehead again and said, "Jacob, you always see the best in people, never the worst. You always make the best of a bad situation without complaining. You are more mature than most adults. You possess so many good qualities." Moshe looked down at the floor for a moment. He was deep in thought. When he looked up at Jacob again, his eyes were moist. He looked directly into Jacob's eyes. "Jacob, I do not know how or why this has happened. But, I believe deep in my heart that you were born for some important purpose." Moshe's mind replayed that angelic presence from the edge of the forest when his village was attacked by Cossacks. *An angel once told me, "Yours will save many."*

Moshe softly stroked Jacob's face with his right hand. With a broken heart, he looked down and smiled at his only child. "God gave you such wonderful qualities and He made you a strong, understanding and loving person. Jacob, I believe that destiny holds a special place for you. I truly believe that you have been chosen to help your people survive. Do not ask me how I know this. But, I do." Jacob looked into his father's eyes. He saw only deep sincerity. "Now," added Moshe, "get out of that hospital gown and get dressed. We're going home."

As Moshe was leaving the room, Heinrich, who had observed the entire scene, remarked in a casual manner, "You know, you Jews will all soon burn in Hell." He said this as though he was describing some obscure or mundane ac-

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tion. He might as well have said, "Rats should be exterminated." It was a moment of epiphany for Jacob. In Heinrich's world, killing Jews was no worse than killing rats. It was that simple for him.

Upon hearing this exclamation, the boy with facial burns suddenly burst into song... "*Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles, uber alles in der welt!*" Jacob suddenly felt sick to his stomach. His father grabbed the tray just in time for Jacob to empty the contents of his stomach. The gentile boys laughed at him. He was very embarrassed. Jacob and his father looked into each other's eyes and, for the first time, his father had no comforting words for Jacob.

"Father, why do they hate us so much?" asked Jacob in the car on the way home.

Moshe contemplated this for a moment before he replied. "Jacob, people often fear things they don't understand, and they fear people with different beliefs. And, when people are very poor, or are in trouble, they are vulnerable to evil persuasion. Jacob, when you were born, life was good for Germans and Austrians. But during the depression, many people lost their jobs and some of them were very angry about it. Many could not afford to buy a loaf of bread. People were destitute and some of them were actually starving. Many lost their self-respect when their jobs disappeared. Men could no longer support their families. Now, there have always been anti-Semitic people in Europe and they found an opportunity to take over the government. They spewed hatred towards the Jews in every possible way. They told people that Jews were responsible for all of the problems in Europe. They pointed out that many Jews, who were still prosperous, enjoyed a good life, while Christian Aryans were starving. Many people believed their evil propaganda. It was easy to hate something or somebody that they did not understand. They think we are all communists, because that's what the Ministry of Propaganda tells them to believe. They paint us as a race of criminals bent upon control of the world. We know it's ridiculous, Jacob. But many people believed it. And now, they are trying to gain control over all of Europe. I'm sorry that you must live through this, Jacob. I wish that it were not true. We, as Jews, have been hated in almost every country and community. We become doctors, engineers, nurses, teachers, artists, bankers and business leaders. We build their cities, cure their ailments, teach their children and give them our sons to die in battle. Yet, to many Europeans, we are still wicked because we are Jews. They despise us for being too poor and they hate us for being too wealthy. We are allowed to treat them in hospitals when they are ill, but they would never think to allow us in their social clubs. I'm sorry Jacob, but it seems that Jews will always be second-rate people in Europe. I am so sorry, my son." Moshe put his arm around Jacob.

It was the loneliest moment of their lives. For the first time, Moshe had accepted the fact that his family was in significant trouble. His heart was very heavy. *It is my fault. I should have taken them away. We must leave our homeland. First, we lost many of the common legal rights of Austrians. Then, we were forced to wear the Star of David upon our clothes. We lost the right to purchase property. Now, we have lost our jobs. What could be next? What else can we lose?*

Chapter 8

The Final Solution

By 1940, the German solution to the “Jewish problem” was well into the planning stages. It had been decided that imprisonment of Europe’s Jews was necessary. As in other European communities following German occupation, most indigenous Jewish families believed that they would be able to endure these new hardships. Some Jews had left Germany and Austria when the Nazi party gained political control. Most obtained exit visas and left for new lives in western countries, like The United States. But the western countries had immigration laws that restricted the number of Jewish immigrants from Europe. So, some went to Palestine, where they often had relatives. But life in Palestine was very different from life in sophisticated European cities. It was a cruel life in Palestine – harsh and dangerous. The educated Jews of Europe longed for a cosmopolitan life, rich in the arts and filled with leisure, travel and politics. And, most Jews in Palestine were Sephardi, while the European Jews were Ashkenazi. They spoke different languages – one Hebrew and the other Yiddish. So, many Jews remained in their homes, telling themselves that the Nazis would soon fall from power. But, they did not fall. And, the Jews that remained in Europe had no idea how far the German government would go to eliminate them. Their optimism disappeared day-by-day.

On January 17th, upon arriving home, Jacob found his mother in tears. His father was mysteriously home from work early. Jacob quickly realized that something very bad was happening. “Father, what is it?” asked Jacob. His mother was sobbing so hard that she could only wave a piece of paper at Moshe. The notice was made on very thick paper, almost cardboard. It was bright red, with dark black ink. At the top, it clearly proclaimed “RELOCATION ORDERS.”

With Jacob’s address and the names of the family, there could be no mistake. The “Provisional German Governing Council for the Austrian Territory” had evicted them from the apartment that they had owned for more than twenty years. They were informed that they must be completely moved out of the apartment no later than January 31, 1940. They were also informed that their new residence would be 1238 Steingasse, and that they must move into that residence no later than the same date. Two other families would be living with them. If they refused, they would be imprisoned and sent to a “work camp in Poland.” Steingasse was a winding street in an old, mostly abandoned part of town, against the canal dividing the city. It was also near the rail line and some old abandoned factories. What a terrible place to live, thought Jacob.

Suddenly, Hanna screamed at Moshe. “What happened at the consulate? Can we get visas to go to America?”

Moshe said, “No Hanna. When I applied for the visas, they told me that America had already reached its quota for Jewish immigration for this year. The

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Americans said that we should try for Palestine, Spain or Portugal. Hanna, I went to those embassies too. They all said we should try to go to Hungary. They said that it's better for Jews in Hungary. So, I went to the Hungarian embassy and they also told me to go to Palestine. But, Hanna, there is really no such country as Palestine. The British control it. So, I finally went to the British Embassy. They told me that too many Jews had already moved to the Holy Land and the Arabs are giving the British a very bad time over it."

Hanna had patiently listened to her husband explain what happened at the various embassies. But now, it seemed as though they had no safe place to go to. Hanna felt like she was backed into a corner by a wild animal, bent on killing her. But, as afraid as she felt for herself, she was terrified for Jacob's safety. Before, with her premonition, it was a deep, hidden, dark fear. But now, it was coming to the surface. Events were moving rapidly now and always in a horrible direction. Their peaceful, happy existence was gone. Now, they had to prepare themselves to fight for their lives. She could recall only one time in her life when she was this frightened.

The relocation orders also came with identity papers for Jacob and his parents. They were told to take those papers "whenever in public." Those caught without proper identity papers would be sent (again, the same threat) to a "work camp in the east." Also enclosed was information about living in their new "ghetto." Being caught without papers, without their "Star of David" patch, or being on the streets after curfew was also a crime punishable by removal to a work camp.

Moshe pulled three yellow cloth patches from the envelope. One was issued for each family member. They came with instructions that "all Jews must display this patch on the front of their clothing whenever outside of a building." Failure to display the patch would lead to imprisonment for any Jew. They were made of common cloth and dyed yellow. Moshe silently gave one of the patches to Hanna and Jacob. Jacob quietly said, "I'm proud to wear the Star of David. I'm proud of my religion. I'm glad to be a Jew." Moshe and Hanna looked at Jacob and then at each other. They both smiled widely. Hanna then fell back into despair. She began to cry softly. The three of them held each other close for a very long time.

Hanna was devastated. Jacob could see her trembling. "What will we do with our china and our silver, Moshe?" She was beginning to cry harder now. "How can we move our new furniture and what about all of our clothing?" she said with her voice rising.

Moshe interjected, "We cannot move furniture. It's forbidden, according to the edict," he said, shoving the papers at Hanna disgustedly.

"We must leave our furniture, Moshe?" she cried harder.

Moshe took Hanna in his arms and led her into their bedroom. They sat arm-in-arm on their bed while Hanna cried. Finally Moshe whispered, "Hanna, what is really important in life, our possessions, or our wonderful son, Jacob?"

"But this is *our* apartment Moshe!" she sobbed, gazing out at the multitude of family pictures and heirlooms scattered throughout the bedroom. She was trembling now and Jacob saw her shaking with anxiety. "What gives them the

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right to throw us out of our apartment?” Tears flowed from her eyes, dripping on their new white bedspread. Hanna stopped sobbing and gazed into Moshe’s bright blue eyes. She replied softly, “You are correct, my love. Our wonderful son is our only truly valuable possession.” They kissed softly and lay on their bed together for the last time. The room which they then abandoned was packed with twenty-five years of tender, loving memories.

Jacob returned to his bedroom, rubbing his sore throat. He went directly to his bed and lay there looking out the window at his beloved city. His chest burned with each breath. For the first time, Jacob was angry. *Why should I have to leave my house? We did nothing wrong! This wonderful place is where I grew up. All of my friends live in this neighborhood. It’s not fair!* As Jacob slipped into sleep, a parade of German military vehicles entered the neighborhood.

Hostile German officers, surrounded by gray-clad soldiers with rifles, went building by building, cataloging who lived in each apartment. The Germans were nothing, if not compulsive record-keepers. They took copious notes, making list after list of Jews; who they were, where they lived and what they owned.

Jacob drifted in and out of a soft, gentle sleep. He was dreaming of Rachael. They were dancing and laughing. In his dream, they were older, by several years. They had been married for some time and had a small child – a son named Michael. After dancing, they walked hand-in-hand through a lush, green valley. Above the valley was a large mountain. There was a long highway. It stretched all of the way to the horizon. One side was green, filled with orange trees. The oranges on these trees were impossibly large and juicy. The other side of the highway was sand. Flat desert stretched as far as the eye could see. Jacob understood that this was his home. He had so much love for Rachael and their child. The scene was overwhelmingly beautiful.

Suddenly, there was a loud pounding at the front door. It woke Jacob from his pleasant dream. Moshe slowly opened the door. Hanna was close behind him as the Germans burst through the door. Jacob arose with a start and stood at the end of the hallway, so that he could see into the living room without being seen. “You will allow us entry to your apartment, Jew,” shouted an officer to Moshe. “What is your name?” Moshe was taken aback by the shouting.

As a rule, Moshe never shouted or yelled at anyone. He was as calm in demeanor as possible. “My name is Dr. Moshe Silverman. I live here with my wife, Hanna and my son, Jacob.”

The officer looked quickly at the other officer, then back at Moshe, with a sly grin. “So, you are a Jew-doctor, eh?”

Moshe was silent for a moment, and then replied. “Yes, I am a Jew.” Each of the Germans laughed for a moment. But it seemed to Jacob to be a satirical laugh, as though they were really saying, “well, you won’t be a Jew-doctor much longer.”

The Germans paraded through each room of the apartment, cataloging the room dimensions, number of windows, hallways, etc. They extracted and examined the identity papers for each of them. To Jacob, it seemed that they were also writing down some of the family possessions. What else could they be doing with those copious notes? Each time he or his parents moved close to the list, the

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holder moved it out of their sight.

Finally, the Germans seemed to be done with their inspection. At the doorway, the lead officer stopped for a moment and turned around to face Jacob and his parents. With a slight wry smile, he looked at Moshe and said, "You will be out of here no later than the end of this month. If you are still here when the new occupant arrives, you will be taken out and shot. You may take your clothing and a few personal belongings. Everything else, including your furniture, will remain. If you do not have your identity papers with you when you leave, you will be shot. If you do not wear the yellow star on your clothing, you will be shot. If you do not follow all of our instructions..."

Suddenly Jacob spoke up... "Yes, I know. We will be shot."

The German officer glared at Jacob intensely in silence. His eyes seemed to bore through Jacob. In this uncomfortable silence, both Moshe and Hanna went quickly to Jacob's side and placed their hands on his shoulders. Finally, the officer looked at Moshe with burning contempt. "We know how to deal with insolent kike children, you know." He stared back at Jacob. "All of you are vermin," he continued without changing his expression. "The sooner we clean you all out from Europe, the sooner we will have our country back. Yes, you may be insolent now, young Jew. But, soon you will feel the mighty boot of our Aryan nation upon your spine, pushing you into the dirt. Yes, you filthy Jews must be emptied from our beautiful land." With his tirade at an end, the officer spat upon the carpet and turned away.

As suddenly as they had appeared, the Nazi soldiers departed. All that remained was cold air from the hallway and dust motes circling around the foyer slowly. In the silence that followed, Hanna began to softly cry. Moshe led her back to their bedroom. Jacob returned to his bedroom. He felt really frightened for the first time. During the past few years, Salzburg had remained somewhat excluded from world events. The government diatribe against Jews seemed to be simply angry words. Jacob and Rachael played games with the German officials. But now, the Germans had taken complete control over Austria and they were implementing their propaganda. For the first time, it really was dangerous to be a Jew in Austria.

Jacob went back to bed, but he could not sleep. His mind was a whirlwind of fear. *What will happen to us? What about my beloved Rachael? Losing our homes and businesses is bad. But, that German officer said that they intended to "cleanse" Europe of Jews. What exactly does that mean? Will we all be transported somewhere else? If so, where will they take us? As these dark thoughts flew about in Jacob's head, another darker thought emerged. What if they mean to kill us, instead of moving us? Could they get away with it? Does the rest of the world know that this is happening? If they did, would they bother to rescue us from Nazi persecution?* Suddenly, Jacob felt very alone and frightened. *If no one will come to our aid, will we soon be dead, as in my nightmare?* Jacob began to cry. He hated himself for doing it, but was unable to stop. As he finally began to fall asleep, one thought came to mind. The thought was more powerful than any other thought he had ever experienced. The thought was one simple word... Rachael. *I have to save Rachael.*

Chapter 9

Forced To Leave Home

A string of successive snowstorms blanketed Salzburg during the early part of January in 1940. It snowed for days on end. During this time, the Jews of Salzburg, now numbering just under two hundred, stayed in their homes and hid from the increasing numbers of German soldiers on the streets. But, now the storms had weakened and, by January 31, the streets and sidewalks had been cleared. In fact, the temperature had improved significantly. On that dreadful day, it was warm enough to rain, so very unusual for that time of year.

Jacob collected as much of his clothing and personal possessions as he could carry and placed them next to the doorway, alongside his parent's suitcases. He thought about leaving his violin, but could not bear thinking about life without music. It was better to carry the instrument along with everything else, than to live with no music.

Moshe emerged from his bedroom wearing a new dark gray suit with a dark red bowtie. Moshe always wore bowties. It seemed to be a deeply ingrained part of his character. Everyone chided him about it. So, sometimes he wore a dress tie. Today would not be such a day. Today would be a day to stand proud of his identity. Today would be a day to maintain self-respect and culture. As Moshe carefully dressed, he thought about how important it would be to remain dignified in front of Jacob. *Don't give these Nazis the satisfaction. Don't show them that you are frightened. Do not reveal the anguish that occurs when your family is being persecuted.* He seemed nervous and fiddled with the three sets of identification papers.

"Jacob, please take our suitcases out to the foyer downstairs," Hanna called from the bedroom. Jacob walked to the doorway of his parent's bedroom to ask about also carrying down their large new painting, by the contemporary artist Chagall. As he looked in, he saw Hanna walking back and forth between her dresser and the bed. She was crying, and far more nervous than ever before. Her complexion was pallid. Back and forth she paced across the room. She reminded Jacob of the large rubber band on a toy airplane. Anxiety was driving its teeth into her depression. It hurt Jacob to see his mother so distraught. *She seems as though she is wound up as tight as anyone can be without breaking.*

Jacob feared that she was on the edge of sanity. "Shall we take the Chagall too, Mother?"

"Yes," she replied, in an absent way. Suddenly, she ran to Jacob and clutched his arms shockingly tight. Panic was in her eyes. She screamed, "Don't forget the violins." Jacob was frightened.

"Don't worry, Mother. I'll take them," he sighed.

Jacob took the family possessions down the two flights of steps to the building foyer. It was a huge, white hallway, with a high curved gray ceiling. At the

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end of the hallway was a thick, heavy wooden door that served all of the apartments in the building. The door was so heavy that it took most of his strength to open it while carrying something. Jacob dropped off the large trunks one at a time, then went back for more. He trudged back up the steps and, just as he neared the top, he saw his father standing in his overcoat and staring at the door. *Why would father be staring at a door? Have he gone over the edge, as well as mother? My God, the look on his face! I've never seen that look before! It's overwhelming sadness. But, there's more. There is also fear. Has he cracked?*

Suddenly Moshe took out his pocketknife. As he brought it up in his hands, Jacob suddenly understood his father's behavior. *He must remove our mezuzah.* For Jews the mezuzah is important signpost upon their homes. Inside of a small metal or wooden box, a biblical passage is written in miniscule script. It contains a passage from the Bible, called the "Shema." In that passage, God commands Jews to keep His words constantly in their minds and hearts, by writing them on the doorposts of their house. The enlightening words of this tiny scroll of parchment have been passed down from generation to generation – for more than three thousand years. They have become the foundation of our moral conscience. The scroll is the soul of the Jewish people. With Hanna watching from the doorway and Jacob watching from the steps below, Moshe used his knife to pry the mezuzah from the doorway that had been their home for almost twenty-five years.

The old oak wood in the doorway creaked and moaned as Moshe struggled to pull the nails out from the frame. It was as though the mezuzah resisted the effort to remove it. Finally, it came out, with both nails bent at an awkward angle. The act of removing the mezuzah seemed physically, if not symbolically painful to Moshe. He grunted and wiped perspiration off of his brow. Hanna winced as the mezuzah came out. Jacob swallowed hard, in fear. *The mezuzah spoke to us. It is wrong to move away.* But, as Moshe turned the mezuzah in his hand, the piece of parchment inside dropped to the floor. This small parchment, which says "Hear Oh Israel, the Lord is our God and God is one," fell onto the dusty floor. Hanna gasped as the parchment hit the floor. "It's a bad omen, Moshe," she whispered, still crying. A tear fell down her face, landing on her blouse. Moshe quickly picked up the parchment scroll, kissed it and replaced it inside of the mezuzah. The beige paint that was hidden behind the mezuzah was much brighter than the paint that surrounded it. Moshe put the mezuzah in his coat pocket. Jacob suddenly shivered. He was certain that evil was nearby. He felt this foreboding in his very bones. *This might be the beginning of a very tragic journey. What will happen to us?* It was one of the saddest moments of his life. A large blast of wind met Jacob and his parents at the street-level doorway. Bracing against the damp wind, Jacob walked across some broken glass and out into the street, away from the only home he had ever known.

Jacob and his parents entered the street in front of their home with all of the possessions that they could carry. They had purchased a wheelbarrow and piled all of their belongings that they could carry upon it. Jacob pushed the laden wheelbarrow with his parents walking at his side. The wind was fierce, blowing directly in his face. They were soon joined by dozens of their Jewish neighbors, forming a long line in the street. Most families had piled their possessions upon

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carts or in wheelbarrows. This sad procession wound its way around corners and down city blocks, often with a gauntlet of cheering crowds throwing objects at them. For Jacob, and everyone else, it was the most humiliating and degrading experience they could have imagined. Their destination, a new ghetto, was about two kilometers away.

On the way to their new ghetto home, they passed through a relatively quiet industrial section of Salzburg. Here, they enjoyed a brief respite from the taunting onlookers. Jacob noticed that almost all of the women in this despondent procession were crying. The men walked with faces down, staring at the rough and broken roadway. Even the usually boisterous children were quiet and introverted. On they marched, in a sad silent procession. A funeral would be no less depressing.

As the Jews reached another neighborhood, more ordinary citizens were waiting. Standing on the edges of their sidewalks, in front of their homes, gentile children came out to scream at the departing Jews. "Go away Jews! Go away Jews! Go away Jews!" Chanting almost in unison, these children and young adults said what their parents lacked the courage to say to the faces of their Jewish neighbors. Many others watched from streets and sidewalks. Jacob marched on, his mind spinning. *Why do they hate me? What have I done to them?* The angry onlookers mocked the despondent Jews along the now-crowded streets. "We hate you!" cried someone. "Never return!" screamed another. A gunshot rang out to the left. Everyone ducked while women screamed out in fear. The hate behind the tone of the children's chanting was burning deeply into Jacob. He was shocked at how openly they berated their Jewish neighbors.

Jacob's friends Adam Levy and Chaim Applebaum arrived, out of breath. Adam arrived first. "Have you seen the ghetto we are to live in, Jacob? My family moved yesterday. It's the most wretched, disgusting place I've ever seen."

Before Jacob could speak, Chaim began talking. "Yes, Jacob, I must agree with Adam. We are forced to live with four large families in a space made for one small family. Worse yet, there is no electricity. The apartments only have running water. There are no toilets inside either. Jacob, they are forcing us to live in squalor."

Jacob looked at them and then smiled. He put his arms around the shoulders of his two closest friends as they walked next to Jacob's parents. "At least we'll have each other," he said with a broad smile. However, Jacob was not smiling inside. In fact, on the inside he was shouting in anger. He never imagined being thrown out of his own home. Now, all that he could do was try to put a pleasant face upon this disaster. He was not sure that it worked.

As they walked with their belongings, it began to rain. The wind-whipped rain felt strange after dealing with snow throughout December and January. It might have been warm enough to rain, but the wind made it feel like ice. At first, it was only a light rain shower, almost a mist. It matched the mood of the evicted Jews. The air was cold enough so that each drop of rain felt like needles on the skin. In this stinging rain, the Jews of Salzburg longed for their abandoned homes that were so much a part of their lives. In those homes, they laughed, cried, argued, made love and raised their children. Those homes were a sacred part of

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their religion. There had been so many Passover Seders, Hanukah celebrations, Purim plays, births and funerals. There, in their beautifully decorated homes, they observed the initiation of their children into Judaism through the ceremonial circumcision and baby naming ceremonies. In those homes, their families hosted the ceremonial breaking the fast after Yom Kippur. In those homes, their children romped and played, made too much noise and broke too many treasured objects. In those homes, families sat shiva together after the death of a loved one, comforting the deep wounds of aching separation. So much of their lives were left behind in those abandoned homes. So much of life itself was abandoned there.

The rain drenched everyone and everything that they carried. The long walk had become a nightmare. Everyone wore many layers of clothes – not only because it was January, but because of the limit of how much they could carry. The weight of waterlogged clothing made everyone's trek more difficult. The older Jews bent down under the weight of their belongings, struggling with each step. It seemed to Jacob that every Jew in Salzburg was now agonizing through the rain-soaked streets. But it could not be a new beginning. To Jacob it seemed as though it could only be a journey with a tragic end. The only good part about the rain was that the chanting crowds of Nazi sympathizers diminished. Still, there were many hundreds of onlookers on that cold and rainy late January day, as Salzburg Austria cleansed itself of the Jewish "problem."

Jacob trudged along the street, balancing three suitcases, a violin, and three large pictures. The wheelbarrow containing clothing and family heirlooms was heavy and it wobbled. They also took their silver and their good china. They took their valuable artwork. Jacob asked permission to return to the home once more in order to take some pieces of furniture. At that idea, Moshe stared in terrified silence. "What will happen to everything that we left?" cried Jacob.

Moshe replied, "Of course, we will never see it again." Jacob wore his only suit over three pairs of trousers, four shirts and his tallit – his prayer shawl that he wore for the first time at his bar mitzvah.

As the procession turned a corner, the new ghetto was in sight. Jacob absorbed countless insults from onlookers. He was called a dirty Jew, kike, filthy Hebrew, lousy vermin and countless other outrageous names. His parents carried their own suitcases next to him. Suddenly, Jacob felt something warm and wet hit the left side of his head. His face stung. Something streamed down his shoulder and left arm. As he looked down, he saw that he had been hit by a ripe tomato. He looked at the person who threw it at him and was appalled to see that it was the seven-year-old boy that had delivered his family's newspaper. Jacob looked into his face. The boy had short, stiff blonde hair and large fierce blue eyes. In the boy's eyes, Jacob saw only hatred. "Go away you rotten, stinking Jew!" the boy implored. A tear fell from Jacob's left eye. It ran into the red tomato juice, and fell to the wet sidewalk.

While walking, Jacob asked how such desperate circumstances could have happened. *Why should we endure such humiliation? Why must we forfeit our homes, our jobs and our valuables? Why must we walk through this gauntlet of angry onlookers who rail at us with obscenities? We have done nothing wrong!*

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We have committed no crimes! We are a polite group who mostly keep to ourselves! In fact, we contribute a great deal to the social, cultural and scientific elements of our community – which we love! Now, hundreds of onlookers took to the streets despite the cold rain to heckle the departing Jews, offering epithets that would be remembered in fear forever. The city that they had grown to love, now hated them.

The Germans selected a poor, abandoned district for the Jewish ghetto. It was near an old industrial section. Warehouses and old, decrepit factories were their new homes. Most Jewish families were forced to live in two to three dilapidated rooms with a kitchen. The roofs leaked; there was no electricity, no central heating or indoor plumbing. Into the disgusting old abandoned housing, the mostly middle-to-upper class Jews of Salzburg moved their belongings. Here, the physicians, bankers, professors, teachers and engineers relented, forced to live in squalor under the barbaric yoke of humanity's most evil empire. Here, the Salzburg Jews would live under the boots of German bigotry. Here, the lack of sanitation would breed disease and death. If it were their intention to kill Jews slowly and painfully, this ghetto would do nicely.

When Jacob and his parents arrived at their assigned new home, they discovered that they had to carry their possessions three stories up, into an apartment half the size of the home they had left. Adding insult to injury, they had to share this small space with two other families, who had already moved in. There were four rooms, plus one bathroom, two bedrooms and no plumbing. The ceiling of virtually each room leaked. Mold was endemic. Cold rainwater dripped endlessly onto rotting floors. It was almost impossible to find a dry spot. Nine other people, including two babies, were their new living partners. The ramshackle building contained almost no furniture and the entire structure carried a putrid odor. The only recent occupants were rats, who scurried about when someone approached. Jacob's new roommates included a professor and his family and the Rabbi of their synagogue, with his family. Apparently, they were all to sleep on the floor.

Jacob still managed to find a silver lining in this nightmare. Rachael, his sweetheart, was assigned to live just down the street. He quickly found her and they spent the day exploring their ghetto. Since the Jewish population of Salzburg was small, the entire population could be moved into one square city block. They explored, hand in hand.

The next day, they discovered several small groups of Jews wandering from building to building. Many of them congregated around burning trash barrels. They discussed a wide variety of issues. One group of intellectuals was having an argument about socialism's alleged virtues over capitalism. "The needs of many outrule the needs of the aristocrats and privileged," asserted a young man with a dark goatee. "No," argued a middle-aged man dressed in a business suit. "We are Austrians," he insisted. "We belong to our national society. I mean, we are all Austrians, here. We should wait until the Nazis are defeated and then our countrymen will defend us."

"That's a joke," cried a thin, balding man named Feldstein. "Almost everyone in Europe hates us because we are Jewish. Do you really think that any-

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one will lift a finger to save us? No, we will never be allowed to return to our homes, our jobs, our schools or our government. There is no place on earth where a Jew is welcome. Even the Holy Land is a dangerous place for a Jew.” This brief, but passionate speech was greeted with silence. Nobody could argue against him. The sad but accurate truth was that it really seemed “dangerous” for Jews everywhere.

To Jacob and Rachael, the threat of Nazi terror receded whenever they were together. They found an abandoned apartment building near the edge of the Ghetto. They soon found a bedroom that had windows facing both inside and outside of the Ghetto. Here, they found beauty in the midst of despair. Here, they found a place to escape from the dreadful war and the hatred. In this room, love triumphed over madness. Here, the world was soft and warm and lovely. Shootings and bombings receded to some distant place. Here, in peace, there was love and warmth.

“Oh Jacob,” Rachael implored. “Promise you will always love me.”

Jacob gazed at her face. Rachael began to play with the dark brown curls framing Jacob's face. Light from a nearby candle danced in her large brown eyes. The candle's light cast flickering shadows on the wall next to them. Rachael's long dark hair fell across her shoulders, framing her angelic face. Jacob gazed into her eyes, passionately. *I wish that this perfect moment could last forever.* Rachael whispered in Jacob's ear. “Oh God, I love you so much.”

Outside, a horrific scene was unfolding. Two young German soldiers with machine guns were having some sadistic fun with an old Jewish man they had “captured.” The old man had a leg amputated and used a crutch. The poor old man was withered and wrinkled with age and disability. He could barely make it up and down curbs, leaning often upon buildings for support. He was incredibly thin, giving him a most fragile appearance. As the old man approached an intersection, one of the Germans took his crutch away and forced him to walk without it. To frighten the old man further, the Germans fired their guns near his only leg. The shots echoed through the neighborhood, bouncing from one building to the next. “Dance, you rotten kike,” they yelled. “Dance or we'll kill you. The frightened old man complied, as best he could, falling several times.

The German soldiers began to beat the captured Jew unmercifully. One of them swung the end of his rifle and smashed it into the old man's stomach. He collapsed and retched bloody vomit. Some of the vomit fell onto one of the German's boots. The soldier recoiled, but not in time. Then he exploded with anger. He began to kick the old man, aiming for his ribs. Again and again, the German kicked the old man. Finally, his badly broken ribs protruded into his lungs, causing massive bleeding. Bright red blood poured from the old man's mouth and nostrils.

But the soldiers were not done. One of them bent over the old man and ripped off his prayer shawl. He began to choke the old man with it. The other soldier picked up the old man's prayer book and set it on fire. When it was reduced to cinders, the soldier stamped his boot upon it. Meanwhile, the other soldier set fire to the man's prayer shawl. The two soldiers laughed as the fire raged.

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With what little strength was left in him, the old man, almost dead, could do nothing more than cry at the loss of his most prized possessions.

The young German soldiers continued to beat the poor old man, without remorse. One of them said, "I'll bet that Jews don't have brains at all."

The other German soldier said, "But they have to have a brain." They argued over this concept for some time, all the while kicking and beating the old man. Finally, the old man collapsed unconscious. Unable to obtain a reaction to their continued beating, one of the German soldiers picked up his rifle and shot the old man in the head. A huge piece of the old man's skull lifted off and flew over the sidewalk, landing in the street gutter. Bright red blood spurted out from the large opening in the old man's skull. Pieces of bone and brains splattered across the sidewalk. The old man's bright red blood ran into the street, where it met a small patch of perfectly white snow. The old man's body twitched briefly, before it became inert and lifeless. The young German soldiers walked away as though nothing had happened, discussing a soccer match. They had no remorse at all.

Inside the building, entwined in each other's arms, Jacob and Rachael talked for hours. They learned about each other's family histories. They exchanged lifelong dreams and ambitions. Finally, after a long moment of silence, Rachael spoke softly. "Jacob, we have been together now for almost a year and I don't even know your Hebrew name."

Jacob smiled. "I actually have two Hebrew names – Yaakov Yehoshua," he replied softly. "I was named after my grandfathers. My father's father had my name. He was Jacob Silverman. My mother's father was Joshua Krieger. He was a great Rabbi in Koval, the village where my parents grew up. Everyone loved and respected him." Then, Jacob's face darkened. "He was killed by Cossacks who raided the village. My grandfather died protecting the Torahs in the little synagogue. They burned it with him locked inside." Jacob looked back at Rachael. "I wish that I could have known him. I've had many dreams about my grandfather Joshua. He always seemed to be reaching out for me. In the dreams, he held out the burning Torahs for me to take. But, he never said anything." Jacob paused for moment and then was silent. Rachael saw that there was something else on his mind. She pushed him to tell.

"Tell me," Rachael demanded.

"Well," replied Jacob. "I can't really explain it, but I think that I have some kind of role to play. It is a feeling that I am supposed to do something, but I don't understand what it is. I feel that it is important, or that it will be important one day." He smiled, trying to relieve the tension.

Jacob noticed how his story had disturbed Rachael. Her eyes had grown dark and stormy. They glistened with fresh tears. Jacob decided to move the conversation on. "And your Hebrew name is Rachael, right?"

Rachael smiled. "It most certainly is. After a moment of silence, she looked up at Jacob. Her eyes were serious. "Jacob, I have the same feelings about my grandmother. I also have dreams about her. In fact, I've had a lot more of those dreams lately. Ever since we were forced to move out, it seems like she's been with me. But Jacob, I never met her. She died before I was born."

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Jacob and Rachael had several more conversations about their long lost grandparents during their captivity. They began to share each other's dreams, looking for meaning or context. Although they continued to struggle with what these dreams meant, one thing emerged upon which they agreed. The memory of their grandparents was strong with them, perhaps for a reason. They both agreed to pry out as much information as possible from their fathers about the grandparents. And, although neither Jacob nor Rachael spoke aloud about it, they secretly held onto the concept that their loving grandparents were in some way reaching out to them from the grave.

Time passed and life went on for the Salzburg Jews in their new terrible ghetto. Old people died and children were born. An old man was killed on a street corner because he was Jewish. Inside the nearest building, two young Jews discovered an overwhelming and timeless love for each other. Life went on for some and ended abruptly for others. But, the world no longer made sense for the Salzburg Jews. How could beauty and love coexist with such evil? More importantly, what were the Nazi's real intentions? How could life be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time, in the same place?

German soldiers positioned themselves with machine gun embankments at each of the four intersections surrounding the new Jewish ghetto. Thus, they had a shooting angle across each street, covering every blind spot. The Jews were allowed outside the ghetto only during tightly regulated daylight hours. During that time, they were able to go out only with an authorized pass. If Jews were caught outside the ghetto during curfew, they could be shot. The Jews were forced by the Nazis to decide upon a leadership group. Moshe's name was immediately nominated. The leaders would meet with the German military commanders and pass new regulations along to the Jewish ghetto population. In this effort, the Jewish leaders had no influence at all. They were simply there to make new restrictive Nazi laws palatable to the remaining Salzburg Jews. The Jews of Salzburg thus adapted themselves to living in a virtual prison, waiting for the war to end, or for the Germans to deport them to a camp "in the East."

Life in the ghetto was unbearable. The apartments had no heat, no telephone, intermittent water and no electricity. Candles became a valuable commodity. So did wood for stoves. Many Jews had money, but it had become almost useless, since they were not easily able to spend it outside the ghetto. The black market became a more reliable source for food, clothing and other necessary items for daily life. Gentile children quickly learned how to earn money by bringing food and clothing to the Jews. They slithered through the fenced-in ghetto, selling all manner of necessary items to the starving, cold Jews. Everyone lived in fear of getting caught outside the ghetto after curfew. On a regular basis, Jews were shot on site for such "violations." And so, the Salzburg Jews, many of whom were doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors and artisans, now lived in a freezing darkness, filled with fear of beatings and death. Postal services became irregular. Incoming mail from Jewish relatives bore bleak news of "deportations" and "death camps" to the east.

The weather was getting worse. Temperatures at night were often below zero. People slept as close as possible to an oven or stove. Some froze to death;

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others began to succumb to illness. Typhus reared its ugly head, along with poor sanitation. Soon, it was common to see dead bodies in front of buildings or on the sidewalk. Since Jews were not allowed outside the ghetto, and the only Jewish cemetery was now off limits, the Germans picked up the bodies in a cart, as they made rounds each day. Despite desperate pleas from the Rabbi, the Salzburg Jews were not allowed to bury their dead.

During the day, only a few Jews were allowed to leave the ghetto to work. There were very few jobs approved for Jews outside the ghetto, although some wealthy families arranged for Jewish women to be servants for gentiles. Most of the remaining Jews shuffled about during the day, engaging in vast philosophical discussions. People congregated outside, burning trash barrels for warmth. Jacob joined these groups on occasion, but mostly just observed and listened.

The months passed by with no good news arriving to any of the Salzburg Jews. Some said that the world had forgotten them. Despite the misery of the ghetto, they would have been fortunate if that were true. But the German government had plans for all of the Jews of Europe, and those plans were for extermination. A small group of young men left to join the resistance. They were older than Jacob and his friends. They proudly exclaimed that they were leaving to join the partisans and fight against the Nazi occupation. Jacob was secretly envious of them. Yet, something deep inside told him that his time to fight had not yet arrived. They were never heard from again.

One day in late February, Jacob joined a rather large group of people who had converged around a warm fire. This group included two physicians, two professors, a teacher, a jeweler, an architectural engineer, a bus driver and a banker. Jacob watched and listened as he stood near the group.

“We should fight,” asserted the bus driver.

“I agree,” said the engineer.

“With what,” cried the teacher? “We have no weapons,” the teacher continued. “And even if we did, they have machine guns.”

The bus driver spoke up. “We could sneak out at night, on the next new moon,” he said. “It will be too dark for them to see us,” he insisted.

One of the physicians then spoke. “You know that the Germans come in and count us every other day. If they find some of us missing, what might they do to those that remain?” The group thought about this in silence for a moment.

“Claus is right,” said the other physician. “If we cause trouble, they will punish us. It is better to follow their rules and wait for the war to end.”

Suddenly, a new voice was heard, coming from behind Jacob. “This has nothing to do with the war,” the man said in a low, commanding voice. It was Hershel Farber, the twenty-year-old mechanic who had saved Jacob’s life in the synagogue fire. Hershel was a tall, thin man a few years older than Jacob. He had long curly brown hair and had a very pleasant disposition. Hershel had lived in Salzburg his entire life.

“The Germans mean to eliminate all of the Jews of Europe,” Hershel said. “And, we cannot wait for the war to end. It would be too late for us. I have a cousin in Krakow. He told me of many Jews from his city who were put in cattle cars on trains and sent to a death camp in Poland. Many Jews died on the long

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ride, without food or water. He said that when the train arrived at the camp, the Jews were taken to 'bath and inhalation rooms' and told that they had to be 'disinfected.' Then, when they went into the shower room, they were gassed to death. He said that they burned the bodies."

The stunned group stared at Hershel in horrified silence. Everyone had heard of such hellish tales. But, hearing it firsthand made the icy news more frightening. He did not seem the type to create stories simply for effect. After a moment, the teacher interjected, "Why was your friend not killed with the others?"

Hershel replied, "He escaped when his family was selected for deportation, hiding in the woodpile behind the train station."

The teacher was not satisfied. "If that is so, how would he know what happened inside the camp?" the teacher cried.

Hershel again replied without any hesitation. "He stole a truck and followed the train. Then, he observed the camp from the woods. He said that he also encountered another Jew who had escaped. That person told him what happened inside the camp. He also told of many other death camps in Germany, and especially in Poland. He said that some of the Jews are allowed to live, in order to make ammunition for the Germans."

The group again stared at Hershel in silence, as though trying to digest his horrific news. Hershel continued, "They take the strong Jews by train to munitions factories all over Germany, to work as slaves," he continued. "But in Poland, they are killing thousands of us every day."

A woman who had said nothing suddenly spoke. "So, where is this man who escaped?"

Hershel turned to the woman and replied, "He joined the partisans."

With each passing word, Jacob became more and more anxious. His mind was gripped with fear. *This man is describing my dream! How could this be possible?* Jacob was shocked and horrified. His nightmare seemed at first to be an impossible tale. Now, with each passing day, it seemed more plausible. He became nauseous listening to it. Hershel's description of a death camp made Jacob's dream feel like reality. He wanted to tell the people about his vivid nightmare, but he was frozen with fear. Suddenly, he blurted it out.

"I saw it happen," Jacob whispered in a low, hoarse and trembling voice." At first nobody heard him, so he had to repeat it louder. "I saw it." It was between a croak and a whisper and Jacob thought that his words were lost in the wind. Most of the group had not heard him. But one of the physicians, Dr. Greenburg, turned to him and said "What did you say Jacob?" Jacob quickly thought of running away, but gathered his nerve together. "I saw it in my dream. It was clear as day. I was there, at the place that Hershel just described. I saw it. My job was to push the bodies of dead Jews into the fire," Jacob said. Now, everyone was staring at Jacob with open mouths and very wide eyes.

"Why should we listen to a teenager's dream?" said Mrs. Schwartz, a former bank clerk.

Jacob continued slowly, trying to remember every painful detail of the dream he had hoped to forget. "I worked in a brick building inside a huge German

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camp,” Jacob continued. “Large numbers of dead bodies were brought into the room by other Jews, like me. We were all dressed in white clothing with red vertical stripes. The Jews were separated by sex and killed somewhere else. The women and girls had their heads shaved.” Jacob trembled as he continued, his heart pounding with fear. “They had numbers tattooed on their arms. I was standing by the furnace and a soldier was screaming at me in German. I stood there for a while and then he walked over to me. He took out his pistol and aimed it at my head and he...” Jacob was suddenly aware that he was crying and quickly used his coat sleeve to wipe his tears away.

“Balderdash!” cried the fat engineer. “That’s utter nonsense,” he asserted. The Nazi’s hate us, but they would never resort to killing us all. The world community wouldn’t stand for it. Why should we listen to the words of rumor and a bad dream?” Many of the observers nodded their heads and agreed with the engineer.

“I just can’t imagine they would kill all of us, just like that,” offered Rebecca Farber, a nurse. Rebecca was Hershel’s sister. She was twenty-five, with brown hair and sparkling green eyes. “They will just detain us until the war is over.” The group nodded their heads again.

“Yes, Rebecca is right,” said an old man, leaning against a lamppost. “If we leave them alone, they will leave us alone,” he observed. “Besides,” he said, “we’re too important to them as a labor force.”

Slowly, the crowd began to disperse. “Wait,” said Hershel to Jacob. “I don’t know about you, but I don’t plan to die in a Nazi shower room,” he asserted. Jacob looked at Hershel. He was not only older than Jacob, but was also much larger. Hershel stood well over six feet and weighed over two hundred pounds. He had a short beard and piercing blue eyes. But his face was elongated and very thin. He also had a long nose that made his face look even longer. For some reason, Jacob felt a strange attachment to Hershel. Behind his rather gruff exterior, however, was a soft and warm personality. Hershel and Jacob grew up together, but were not close friends. While Jacob never thought of himself as being a snob, he had come to realize that most of his friends had fathers who were professionals. His friends were the sons and daughters of doctors, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, professors, business owners and administrators. Hershel’s father was a bricklayer. His mother worked in a factory. Yet, although they were not close in school, Hershel always admired Jacob and Rachael. They spoke rarely, yet Hershel was always kind to them. It seemed that he was also going out of his way to be friendly with Jacob now.

“My friend,” began Hershel in a soft, low voice, “the Germans mean to *exterminate* every Jew in Europe. Do you think they just say these things in speeches and on the radio to frighten us? They will use only the strongest of us for forced labor, to make munitions. The others... those too old or too young to work, or those too sick, will be killed and burned. But never kid yourself, young Jacob, in the end they mean to kill us all. Just listen to the Nazi radio broadcasts. Their propaganda makes the Germans and the Poles hate us more than ever.”

Jacob looked into Hershel’s eyes and saw truth there. It did seem as though most of the population of Europe hated Jews. Perhaps they had always hated

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Jews. Hershel had no reason to make up such stories. There would be nothing for him to gain from them. But, wondered Jacob, would nobody else in the world stop them? *Perhaps nobody else in the world knows the real horrific truth!* As facts would later prove, there were other countries that knew about the death camps as early as 1939. But targeting them for destruction was not a high priority. Military targets seemed to be of greater value. And so, the killing continued.

Chapter 10

Life In The Ghetto

That evening, Jacob and Rachael held each other tightly in front of a small fire in the fireplace of an old abandoned apartment. After a long silence, Jacob began to tell Rachael of his dream. “Rachael, it was the most vivid dream that I have ever had,” Jacob whispered. “It was just like *being* there,” he added. He gazed into Rachael’s eyes, and then asked, “Do you think it really could happen?”

Rachael shivered in Jacob’s arms. “How can people do this to us, just because we are Jews? Why do they hate us so much?”

After another long silence, Jacob said, “I think that we might need to run away, Rachael.” This new thought frightened Rachael much more.

“I don’t want to leave my father or my sister,” Rachael cried.

Jacob cradled her face softly. “I don’t want to leave my parents either, Rachael. We must convince our parents to run away with us,” Jacob said with determination.

An hour later, Jacob was describing his dream to Rachael’s father, Ariel. “Run away?” he shouted. “Exactly where would you run, young Jacob?” Ariel seemed more annoyed with Jacob’s story than afraid.

That troubled Jacob greatly. He thought for a moment, and then replied to Ariel. “We could go to Palestine. I’ve heard that many European Jews have fled to Palestine and found a safe home there,” Jacob explained in an optimistic tone.

“Yes,” cried Rachael. “Our cousin Goldie moved to Palestine from Warsaw last year, Father.”

Suddenly, Ariel interrupted her. “And, what have you heard from her lately, Rachael?”

She thought about it for a moment. “Well, I haven’t heard anything,” she said, obviously disappointed.

Ariel looked down at the floor. “Perhaps Palestine is not so safe either.”

“We can’t just stay here and allow the Germans to move us into ghettos, or worse,” insisted Jacob. “If we do what the Germans tell us to do, we will all die,” he cried.

Ariel stood up, irritated. “Stop this nonsense,” he thundered, now shaking his fist at Jacob. “See what you’ve done,” he said, looking at Anna, who was now whimpering. “We’ll do what Jews have done since the time of Abraham,” insisted Ariel. “We will be patient until the pogrom is over. The Nazis will eventually lose the war and we will return to our lives.” Jacob and Ariel stared at each other for a moment, while Rachael put her arms around Anna, still crying softly. “Now,” said Ariel, “there will be no more talk of running away in my house!”

The next evening, Jacob discussed his dream in equal detail for the benefit of his parents. This time, the other two families in Jacob’s new ghetto apartment

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also listened. Afterwards, Moshe said, "Jacob, it was only a dream. We all have frightening dreams from time to time," he continued. "Let's hold on a while longer. Perhaps the Germans will leave us alone."

Everyone, including the Rabbi, agreed with Moshe. "Yes, let's wait a while longer," the Rabbi intoned. "It could get better. Besides... it's just a dream that you had," the Rabbi continued. "Perhaps you had indigestion when you were sleeping." Everyone laughed as they got up and walked away. Jacob and Rachael were not amused.

A week later, Jacob was walking near the west gate of the ghetto when he heard a commotion in the street, just outside. To his amazement, he saw three German soldiers beating a very old Jewish man. Jacob saw that it was Heine Goldman, a tailor who had lived near Jacob's old apartment. Jacob guessed his age at eighty years old, or more. He was a small man, hunched over from years of work, with a few wisps of white hair on his mostly bald head. Heine seemed to have a smile for everyone he met. He was kind and generous. Although poor, he often tailored for no pay, especially if his client was also poor. Heine had done some wonderful work for Jacob's family. Jacob could not recall Heine without his ubiquitous, enduring smile. He was considered the most generous and devout member of the community. Everyone loved little old Heine Goldman. He had tailored Jacob's Bar Mitzvah suit. It now seemed like a lifetime ago.

"What are doing here, you old kike!" shouted one of the German soldiers. "You don't deserve to live, you vermin!" exclaimed another soldier. He suddenly swung his rifle butt into the air and slammed it down as hard as possible on top of Heine's skull. Blood spurted up from Heine's head like a red fountain. Jacob could see the old man's eyes turn up in their sockets. Jacob surged forward in a fury and ran towards the gate. Suddenly, he stopped himself. If he tried to help Heine, he also would be killed, or at least sent away, never to return. Jacob fought the overwhelming desire to help this sweet old man.

Heine fell to the ground, barely conscious. As he crawled back towards the ghetto, the third soldier kicked him ferociously in the ribs. Heine fell silent. Jacob could see that he was still breathing. Edging closer to the gate, Jacob meant to rescue Heine as soon as the soldiers went away. The first soldier again raised his rifle and smashed it on Heine's head. It sounded like someone had crushed a melon. Blood, bone and bits of brains spurted out and onto the gray sidewalk. Jacob would remember the sound of Heine's skull crunching underneath that rifle for the rest of his life. He had clearly never seen anything so vividly horrible and disgusting. Jacob began to retch. The Germans backed away quickly, as though fleeing a fire. The thought of cleaning the Jewish blood from their boots or trousers must have been disgusting. Soon, an argument ensued. The Germans shouted at each other about whether to report the incident, then about whether to just leave the body where it was. They finally walked away, leaving Heine's body on the sidewalk. His legs were twisted underneath him in an awkward and unnatural position. Blood flowed onto the sidewalk, forming a pool in the nearby gutter. Jacob softly began to recite the Mourner's Kaddish for this sweet old man, who was incapable of hurting another human being. Deep inside, however, Jacob's sadness was turning into anger.

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Later that evening, Jacob met Rachael at their “secret place,” a dilapidated old abandoned apartment. It had no furniture except for some moldy mattresses on the floor. They held each other tightly for a long time without speaking. Finally, Rachael spoke, almost hesitatingly. She seemed to be selecting her words carefully. “Jacob, my sweet dearest love, I could never live without you. I love you more than anything. You know that don’t you?” she asked, gazing into Jacob’s blue eyes.

Jacob replied, “Of course I do. And, I could never live without you, my dear.” Rachael was overwhelmed by Jacob’s tenderness and respect.

“Promise me you will always be mine,” she gasped, holding his head in her hands, while looking into his deep blue eyes.

“I promise never to leave you Rachael,” said Jacob.

“Please, Jacob,” she implored. “Stay here with me forever.”

His thoughts focused upon the ultimate beauty of the moment. *How can two people be so much like one?* They remained together, with an intense passion.

Inside an old, leaking, decrepit building that once was a factory, Jacob Silverman and Rachael Goldberg, for a brief moment, in a world filled with hate, death, torture and pain, were in paradise.

Chapter 11

The Winter Of Discontent

During the late winter, Jacob and Rachael became as close as only true lovers can. Their love blossomed from infatuation into maturity. Although still both teenagers, Jacob and Rachael had been hardened by their travails. They returned to their secret place several more times. Something deep inside called out to them to love quickly and deeply. As Jews in Europe, they were beginning to understand that their lives were at stake. And while Jacob's nightmare had not come back for several weeks, it endured within him intensely. He still felt as though his life was on a continuum toward a horrible death at the hands of Germans. The only time that Jacob was not deeply disturbed by his dream was when he was in Rachael's arms. He spoke of this to no one.

The ghetto was now beginning to show the signs of death everywhere. The Salzburg Jews had almost nothing to eat and were literally starving. Along with malnutrition and unsanitary conditions came typhus and tuberculosis. Everyone lived in fear of it. Bodies appeared on streets and sidewalks daily. People knew that lice helped to carry this deadly disease. But, without water, it was virtually impossible to bathe regularly. And, without medicine, it was not possible to treat sick patients. Jacob's father, along with another doctor, created a makeshift infirmary in a vacant building. Still, they couldn't do much more than diagnose illness without medicine. Many of the Salzburg Jews died that winter. Young children and the elderly seemed to be the most susceptible.

How could life have come to this for Jacob, his family and the Jews of Salzburg? Just a year ago, they were happy and constructive citizens of Austria. They went to school, worked, shopped, and were in no imaginable way a threat to anyone. The Salzburg Jews stayed mostly to themselves, were courteous, kind to their neighbors, remained lawful and insulted no one. All that they wanted from their Christian neighbors was to be friendly and helpful. Now, only a year later, they had lost their jobs, their homes, their money and valuables, and were forced to live in squalor. But why? What did the Jews do to deserve such punishment?

The Jews of Salzburg endured the rest of the winter without additional hardships imposed upon them by the new government of Austria. But they had begun to hear from family members countless stories of "concentration camps," places where Jews, political prisoners, homosexuals and Gypsies were taken into forced labor. More and more often, they would hear stories about "death camps," similar to Jacob's description from his dream. Still, most of this increasingly smaller group of adults denied that it could be true. "How could the Germans get away with it?" many of them countered. "It can't really be true." Nevertheless, Jews were summarily shot for miscellaneous minor infractions, such as curfew violations, or buying bread from someone outside the ghetto. Each week, the

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population of the Salzburg Jews dipped, from sickness and from summary executions by German guards.

Week by week and month by month, the Jews of Salzburg slipped deeper into the iron grip of Nazi occupation. Many of them thought that life could not possibly get worse than this. And, inevitably, life became worse. They began to lose track of relatives. Mail was not delivered or picked up regularly. They heard rumors that the Nazis were opening and reading mail to and from their relatives. Without access to mail, the Salzburg Jews soon became separated from the rest of the world. Their status was now that of a prisoner. Spring passed into summer. Sickness and starvation preyed upon the stranded Jews. Their numbers tumbled continuously. In July, Jacob's nightmare returned. He soon dreaded sleep. Only interludes with Rachael kept him sane.

On August 8, 1940, another red "RELOCATION NOTICE" placard appeared on the doorway of Jacob's ghetto apartment, proclaiming that the occupants must be ready to travel on August 18th, and that they would be allowed to carry no more than one suitcase per person. Hanna cried again, but this time Jacob noticed that she was much less hysterical. After all, they had already lost their home, their valuables, their money and their self-respect. Their friends and neighbors were dying from lack of sanitary conditions and medication. How much worse could relocation be? Moshe calmed her and she slowly recovered her composure. They packed their few belongings, automatically, as if they had become used to being moved from place to place.

Chapter 12

Deception, The Heart Of The Enemy

Rachael's sister, Anna, became ill in June and her condition continued to deteriorate. Moshe examined her daily, providing some medication whenever he could borrow it. Still, Anna became increasingly ill. She coughed continuously and had a raging fever. One evening, Moshe confided to Jacob that Anna had typhus. "She will probably not survive long," he told Jacob." Moshe insisted that Jacob promise not to discuss this with Rachael. Moshe wanted Rachael and Ariel to believe that she would recover. Indeed, had the Salzburg Jews been not been forced to live with raw sewage and if they had access to hospital services, there might be hope. "In this sewage and rodent-infested ghetto, she has almost no chance at all," bemoaned Moshe. Now, with Anna's life hanging by a thread, they were supposed to move her to a new ghetto? How could they expect her to survive? On top of this, Europe was experiencing a terrible heat wave. Even strong people are at risk of severe dehydration during transport. The trains rarely stop until they arrive at their destination. And when they do stop, no one is allowed out of the train.

Moshe went to the commandant of the local German Army garrison. When asked about his business with the commandant, he replied, "I beg to discuss with the commandant, the deplorable conditions of our ghetto and the desperate need for medication." The commandant's staff looked at each other and smiled. Some of them chuckled under their breaths. Moshe was forced to wait more than six hours.

The commandant's office was excruciatingly hot, with almost no ventilation. Moshe was drenched in sweat when he was finally brought into the commandant's office. The commandant of the local ghetto was Colonel Hans Schroeder, an overweight career officer close to retirement age. He had close-cropped gray hair and the stubble of a white beard showing. It looked like he had not shaved for days. He sat behind his large desk, smoking. He coughed constantly. Behind him was a portrait of Hitler, resplendent in his dark uniform – hand outstretched in salute to a large crowd. Moshe gazed at it with unrelenting defiance. *How noble he looks, this killer of Jews!* Colonel Schroeder was in a foul mood and seemed very uncomfortable. He gave Moshe a distracted glance and motioned for him to sit in front of the desk. Moshe fell into the deep brown leather chair. His mind was spinning. He was tired and hungry. He watched as the commandant periodically clutched his chest with his hand, in obvious discomfort. His complexion was pallid. Moshe could diagnose his condition easily. *This man is on his way to a myocardial infarction.*

"What the hell do you want from me," grunted Schroeder. "I've got a lot of work to do and I feel like shit." Moshe's mind flew with possibilities. *Schroeder's complexion is gray and his lips are blue. He'll soon be in cardiac failure.* Moshe

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was in luck. *Perhaps he'll give me some medication in return for treating his coronary artery disease, not that there is a lot that I can do for him.* Schroeder's heart problems could be exactly what Anna Goldberg needed to live.

Moshe began in almost a whisper. "How long have you been sick, Herr Commandant?" Schroeder, who had avoided eye contact with Moshe, suddenly looked up at him. Moshe could relate with this Nazi. He too, had coronary artery disease. They had the same symptoms. *Now, I've got his full attention.* Moshe continued, "How often do you have the chest pain? Does it radiate into your arm or into your jaw? Does it increase with exertion or stress? Do you find yourself breathless or in a sweat? The Colonel just stared at him. *He's probably wondering what would happen if he was caught allowing a Jew to practice medicine on him.* "I can help you, you know," said Moshe, still in a very soft voice.

Schroeder got up and slowly walked across the room. He shut the door tightly. "What can you do for me, Jew doctor? You know, I'm not supposed to allow a Jew to touch me."

Moshe looked directly into Schroeder's eyes. "I have some medication that can help you, temporarily. I should give you a complete examination, although I have a pretty good idea what's wrong." Moshe allowed Schroeder few seconds to digest this information. He presumed, correctly, that Schroeder was dying, and that Schroeder understood that he was dying. He knew that the commandant would be desperate for help.

Schroeder paced nervously around the room. He seemed anxious about being in the same room with a Jew. But, he also was a desperate man. He understood that his heart was failing. Yet, the German Army could not (or would not) provide him with a decent doctor. He was hundreds of miles away from his own home and his doctor. Schroeder was in a horrible position. He could sit in his chair and wait for death, or he could trust this Jew doctor and his medication. He lowered his voice and whispered to Moshe, "What, exactly, do you want?"

Moshe said, "I can give you some medication that will help to reduce the effects of your chest pain. But, in return, I require medication for typhus. That's all that I want from you." Moshe watched closely as Schroeder contemplated his request. He continued to pace, nervously. Finally, Schroeder seemed to relax a little. He puckered his pale blue lips, deep in thought.

Finally, he returned to his chair, opposite of Moshe. "All right, I'll give you your medication. But first, you must give me your medication." Moshe was ecstatic. *Perhaps Anna, as well as the others with typhus, will now have a chance!*

Opening his medical bag, Moshe fumbled through a number of vials, bottles, syringes and various types of medical equipment. Finally, he found what he was looking for. It was a small brown glass container. He brought it out and carefully opened it. He gave Schroeder a tiny white pill. "Take this and put it under your tongue," said Moshe. "Keep it there until it dissolves." Schroeder took the minuscule pill in his fingers and held it out in front of his face, gazing at it. He looked back and forth between the pill and Moshe. Schroeder was clearly having trouble with this decision. *What if this Jew is trying to poison me? It could be a trick. Jews are very tricky people. They always lie and try to deceive good Christian people.* He knew this to be true from government propaganda. Still,

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Schroeder was aware that he would soon be dead if he did nothing.

“What is it?” growled Schroeder angrily.

Moshe replied, “It is a condensed form of nitroglycerine.” Schroeder glared at Moshe and moved to throw the pill away. “Stop,” cried Moshe, pleadingly. “I swear to you that it will help. It is a very small amount and it has been proven to dilate arteries, including coronary arteries. Schroeder was still suspicious. However, his brief temper tantrum had again produced a strong wave of chest pain. *It feels like someone has placed an anvil upon my chest. I must try it. But, I will have this Jew shot if it doesn't help.* He called out to his junior officer, just outside the door, who promptly entered the room. The young man was an SS lieutenant, with a holstered pistol next to his right hand. He seemed preoccupied and nervous.

Grasping the brown glass vial filled with pills, Schroeder spoke slowly, as if carefully choosing his words for effect. “If anything happens to me after I take this pill, you are to shoot this man. Do you understand?”

The nervous junior officer nodded and replied sharply, “Yes, Herr Commandant.” He glanced quickly down to Moshe who sat comfortably across from Schroeder. His face held no expression.

Slowly, carefully, Schroeder placed the small pill under his tongue. For a minute or two, the two men stared at each other silently across the cluttered desk. Moshe prayed that the man's chest pain would subside, at least temporarily. *Let the man die later, please.* Then slowly, Schroeder smiled and said, “Yes, I can feel it is working. My pain is not so bad now.” He looked around the room and out the window for a moment. Then, Schroeder grabbed the pill container and quickly put it in his pocket.

Moshe said softly, “Don't take more than two in fifteen minutes or you'll have a king-sized headache.” He smiled at Schroeder.

But, Schroeder did not return Moshe's smile. Suddenly, Moshe understood that something was wrong. “Where is my medication?” asked Moshe. I will need enough for at least twenty-five patients with typhus.”

Schroeder abruptly stood up and, at the same time faced the lieutenant. “You will escort this Jew back to his quarters,” Schroeder barked at the young man.

Moshe was startled and confused. “But, the typhus medication... where is it?” Moshe was furious. He had never felt so much anger. He screamed, “You gave me your word that I would have that typhus medication!” Schroeder sat down behind his huge desk and began to rifle through some papers. Moshe, unable to contain his fury slammed his fists upon the desk. “You told me!” Schroeder's lieutenant grabbed his pistol in his right hand. He pointed the gun at Moshe.

“Get out of here and never come back,” thundered Schroeder. “I don't give a damn about your typhus epidemic. As a matter of fact, the faster you Jews die the better for everyone else. You stinking, foul worthless Jews are a curse upon all of Europe. Worse yet, we know about your plans to take over governments everywhere. You Jews must be eliminated before you can finish your evil deeds. Yes, I hope all of you contract typhus and die!” Schroeder looked at his

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officer and shouted, "Now get him the hell out of here!"

On the way back to the ghetto, Moshe was gripped by a spell of his own chest pain. For several months now, Moshe had convinced himself that the tightness in his chest was nothing worse than heartburn or indigestion. Yet, the physician in him understood that it was coronary artery disease. Under the best circumstances, he probably had only a few more years to live. In the custody of Nazi oppressors, perhaps he would die within months. Moshe began to ruminate over the value of his life. As he walked back into the ghetto, Moshe thought about all of the things he now would be unable to do. He had reached the zenith of his profession. But, would he live to see his grandchildren? The answer was probably not. He thought about how the Germans now controlled everything that was meaningful in his life. He wondered if there were Germans that did not believe that Jews were evil. He now understood how powerful the German propaganda machine was. *Is it really possible that all Germans now despise all Jews?* Moshe began to tremble as he finally accepted the enormity of his predicament – that the Nazis truly meant to exterminate Jews from the face of the planet. *My God, they have the capability and the means to kill every Jew.* He was suddenly sick to his stomach. In a moment, Moshe was overcome by his nausea. He bent over and vomited into a curbside sewer grating. The officer escorting him backed away quickly. *He probably thinks that I carry some horrible disease.* For the first time, Moshe understood that these Nazis were not just troublemakers and that they would not fall from power any time soon. For the first time, Moshe feared greatly for Hanna and for Jacob. He fell into a deep, deep depression.

Chapter 13

The Train Ride

Throughout the night of August 17th, Ariel Goldberg stooped over the bed of his younger daughter, Anna. She was unconscious. Her complexion was ashen and her breaths came in great, hoarse gasps for air – followed by an exhale that rattled deep within her chest. She had a high fever and perspiration clung to her forehead. Ariel had prayed for days that this old, moldy mattress would not be her deathbed. Now, he knew that it would not. The Nazis were forcing everyone to travel. But, he could not believe that Anna would survive the trip. Ariel's hands were shaking so much that he could not read the prayerbook he was holding. Tears flowed from his eyes. They ran down his jowly cheeks and fell into the sheets below Anna's face. He gazed at his precious daughter and knew with the certainty of a physician that her end was near. Suddenly, Ariel exploded in emotion. His body trembled as he sobbed over his frail daughter. "I am so sorry my little Anna. I should have been a better father for you," he cried. "When your mother died, I promised to take good care of you and Rachael. But I had to work and I had other responsibilities in the community. And, I thought it was so important that I work and try to save others. But, I should have stayed with you. I should have been a better father. Now, I feel so guilty."

Moments later, Anna opened her eyes for the first time in two days. She was so weak that it was very difficult to speak or move. With great effort, she focused her eyes on her father and forced her right hand up to touch his face. Her voice was barely more than a whisper. "Father, I love you so much. Please do not think that you haven't been a good father. I know that you had to work. And yes, you helped many people." Anna's strength began to quickly wane. She was slipping back into the darkness. Suddenly, she opened her eyes and summoned all of the strength she had left in her infection-ravaged body. "You are the best father that I could ever imagine. I love you Papa." Anna's eyes closed again, and she lost consciousness for the last time. Ariel was overcome with grief and frustration. *If I only had medication and a clean place to live!* He remained with her throughout the night.

On the hot morning of August 18, 1940, Jacob, Moshe and Ariel carried Anna onto the train for relocation. They placed her on the floor, which had been covered with straw and put a blanket over her shriveled, emaciated body. Jacob was shocked at how light Anna was. *I've picked up dogs that weigh more than poor little Anna.* The remaining Jews of Salzburg boarded the same cattle cars on a train that would take them to their next place of imprisonment. Everyone had to stand, and they were packed in like sardines. At first, Jacob welcomed the shade. Everyone had been forced to line up for roll call under a burning, hot sun. They stood in the dreadful heat for hours until the Germans were done counting, re-counting and recording names. The shade of the cattle car felt good. But, the

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Germans provided no water. Jacob listened to the constant conversation. Some people said that the train was going to Prague. Hershel, Jacob's friend from childhood, said that he heard about it when the engineer told his staff.

As the train jerked to a start, Anna was barely alive. Her face was impossibly white and her lips were turning blue. Dark circles surrounded her gentle, green eyes. Perspiration fell back from her face into her delicate, light brown hair. Her respiration was weak, and the rattling in her chest was now louder than ever. Ariel, ever the physician, monitored her every symptom and wrote it down in a journal. His thoughts were dark. *She has a great deal of fluid in her lungs. She is drowning in her own body!* Ariel could no longer assist her in regaining consciousness. She was completely unresponsive.

Jacob looked at Rachael in despair. She had been crying continuously as she stared down at her young sister, running her hand through Anna's beautiful hair. Jacob put his arm around her. She was trembling. He looked at Ariel. *Poor Ariel, he looks twenty years older than he did just a few weeks ago.* Ariel was trembling and crying. Soon, the welcome shade of the cattle car was transformed into torrid heat by the midday sun, as well as the heat produced by a hundred bodies pushed together into a small space. The car soon began to stink from human waste.

Finally, around noon, the train stopped for water and a German soldier shoved the heavy train door open. The conversation stopped. Jacob fell into fear. His mind whirled in anxiety. *Will they kill us here? Why have we stopped?* Yet, the Germans did not allow anyone off of the train. Moments later, the door was again closed and the terrible heat returned. In minutes, the inside of the cattle car was overwhelmingly hot and fetid. The heat was made worse by the fact that almost everyone was wearing several sets of clothing, plus an overcoat. After all, they had been told that they were being moved to a "labor camp" and that they should take clothing for each season. So, the men, women and children were bundled up with their winter clothing on a steamy August afternoon. No one wanted to be without winter clothes and coats in January. Also, in secret, almost everyone carried in their clothing a lifetime of jewelry, money of all denominations, precious objects and family heirlooms. Thus weighed down by their artifacts and clothing, the heat was immeasurably destructive to the Jews of Salzburg. Whatever destiny called them, these people were not about to leave their precious possessions behind for the Germans to steal.

The train lurched to a start with a jerking motion and soon blessed clean air was flowing through the cracks and openings of the wooden cattle cars. The train continued for many hours through the summer countryside, without stopping. Jacob then understood why the Germans had placed so much straw inside the train's cars. There was no place to urinate and defecate, except inside of the train – and in the presence of each other. They decided to allocate two corners of the cattle car for urine and fecal material. Groups of men on one side – and women on the other side – shielded people from view when they were relieving themselves. The Germans gave them two buckets for such a purpose. Of course, many of the prisoners were ill. Regardless, the two buckets were insufficient for the bodily waste of a hundred people. The stench inside of the train was soon

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beyond belief. Periodically, people would vomit – again into the straw. Within hours, the odor was inconceivable. Even with air coming in through the cracks while the train was moving, the smell was appalling. Jacob recalled the smelly latrine at his boyhood camp. *This is a thousand times worse. And, there is no escape!* Suddenly, Jacob remembered something that his father had taught him as a child. He said that Jacob could tolerate any bad odor, if he could breathe only through his mouth. He tried it now. *Yes, it works!* He told Rachael and others nearby how to deal with the putrid odor.

The train bounced on and on through mountains, wilderness, farmland and the occasional small town. Jacob was alarmed. *How much longer can a train go on without stopping for water?* The train consistently was headed east. Calculating time and speed, Jacob estimated that they were in Czech territory. And still, the train plodded on. Sometime during the night, it began to rain. At first, everyone welcomed it. It dampened some of the odor. And, it cooled the hot air inside the stuffy, fetid train. However, by the next morning everyone was cold. Their damp clothing hung upon them, heavy and wrinkled. And, the few drops of water that fell through the cracks did little to quench their powerful thirst.

At the time the Salzburg Jews had been locked into the train, many were gravely ill. By the second day of travel, they began to die, one by one. During the afternoon of the second day, an old woman suddenly began to scream incoherently. She had to be restrained by several strong men. Then, Jacob saw the reason. Her husband, a fragile old man, lay crumpled in a corner of the car. His dark eyes stared into emptiness. Jacob was repulsed. *I've never seen a corpse before!* He had anticipated being disgusted at the sight of a dead body. But somehow, after a few minutes, he was not. In fact, Jacob discovered that he was devoid of all feeling. *What is wrong with me? Where are my feelings?* Within hours, two more elderly people died. The bodies were placed together and covered with old coats.

And still, the train went on. It was dark now. Conversation had stopped. All that Jacob could hear was wind coming through the cracks and the constant drumbeat of the train's wheels rolling along the never-ending tracks. He licked his lips, which were cracked and dry. His throat was parched. He had never gone this long without water. He had fasted on Yom Kippur since his bar mitzvah. But that was only twenty-four hours. *How many others will die? When will this inhumanity stop?*

Ariel and Rachael took turns tending to Anna. Ariel took her tiny wrist every few minutes and stared at his watch. He listened to her heart with his stethoscope. Periodically, he had Rachael lift Anna's body so that he could listen to her lungs. Each time, he shook his head in despair. Over time, Anna soiled herself. Ariel wanted desperately to get her out of the train and cleaned up. He soon began to pace back and forth, running into people because of the cramped space. His eyes took on a wild appearance. With desperate eyes and a few days' growth of white beard, he looked like a different person. Wrinkles appeared around his eyes that Jacob had not seen before. For the first time, Jacob became seriously concerned for Ariel's sanity. *The man is disintegrating before our eyes.* Anna looked worse than ever. Her skin was now grey and her lips had turned

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dark blue. Her respiration had decreased to almost nothing. Rachael looked back and forth between Ariel and Anna. She too was becoming increasingly agitated. Jacob tried to comfort her with no success.

Near dusk on the second day, the train finally stopped for water and fuel. But again, the Germans refused to allow the Jews out of the train. They had been locked inside of the train for more than fifty hours with no food and no water. Jacob also became increasingly agitated and was powerless to stop it. Soon, almost everyone was screaming and pounding against the sides of the cattle car. The hunger, thirst and disgusting conditions had finally reached a peak with the prisoners inside. Despite inherent weakness, the Salzburg Jews railed against their German captors for the freedom to step outside. Some of the German soldiers moved close to the sides of the train, only to be repulsed by the stench, which emanated from every crack and opening.

In the middle of this bedlam of screaming and pounding, Jacob watched as Ariel swiftly bent low over Anna. He had been listening to her heart with his stethoscope. Suddenly, he pulled off the stethoscope and placed his ear directly over her heart. A moment later, he looked up and howled in anguish. His wonderful, loving daughter Anna was dead. Rachael, observing this, also began to scream. Their cries were unheard above the screaming of the starving, thirsty prisoners, trapped in the heat and the stench. Anna had never regained consciousness.

The prisoners begged their German captors to allow them to dispose of their dead. The thought of continuing on with decomposing bodies in such hot conditions was abhorrent. Finally, while reluctant, German soldiers removed Anna's body along with the others. Jacob watched through a crack in the side of the train as they threw little Anna on top of a garbage heap behind the train station. "More vermin for the vermin," growled one of the soldiers.

Then, an officer allowed the Salzburg Jews to step off the train, but only for a few minutes. Everyone ran to a nearby watering trough for horses. The water was filthy, with objects floating in it. But, like parched horses, they drank it as fast as they could. People in line pushed and jostled with each other to get a chance to drink. Jacob allowed Ariel, his parents and Rachael to drink first. By the time it was his turn, he was lapping up dirty water from the bottom of the trough. It felt wonderful going down his parched throat. He drank until his tongue was lapping against the gritty bottom of the trough. Despite the sand and dirt (and whatever other particles clung to it), Jacob thought that no water ever tasted so good. He said a silent prayer in gratitude. Then, they were forced back into the putrid cattle cars.

As he walked up the ramp into the foul train, Jacob looked for Ariel. He was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, he heard a commotion coming from the garbage heap behind the station. Rachael and her father stood crying at an old wooden fence that separated them from Anna's body, which resided just meters away on top of the stinking garbage heap. Her open brown eyes stared endlessly at the blue sky, her neck bent at an unnatural angle. Ariel found himself unable to move or stop crying. German soldiers, anxious for the train to move on, began to scream at him. Still Ariel did not move. Rachael tried to pull him away, but

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without success. One of the soldiers raised his rifle.

Jacob was stunned. The Germans were about to kill Ariel and Rachael! *Oh my God, they are going to kill my beloved!* Jacob turned and sprang down the ramp, running as fast as his legs could carry him. He raced to the garbage heap behind the station. German soldiers were shouting everywhere. They ran after Jacob. Rachael screamed at her father to turn away. Jacob ran past a German soldier who muttered, "One less Jew won't matter to anyone." The German raised his rifle and pointed it at Ariel and Rachael. Jacob's heart lunged into his throat. *No! No! No!* Ignoring the screaming German soldiers, he raced to the wooden fence and pulled Ariel away. Ariel was surprisingly strong for an older man who had been deprived food and water for a long time. It took every ounce of Jacob's strength to pull him away from his dead daughter. Ariel screamed incoherently as Jacob dragged him back to the train. Rachael followed by her father's side, crying. Once inside the train, Ariel slumped to the floor, defeated and dejected. Jacob sat next to him, trying to catch his breath. Rachael grasped Jacob's arm and whispered in his ear, "Thank you. That was the bravest thing I have ever seen."

As the train shuddered back to life, sunlight glinted from the top of the trash heap. Jacob, Rachael, Moshe, Hanna and Ariel each found cracks in the cattle car's exterior so that they could glimpse Anna's body. For a moment, Jacob was certain that he saw the Star of David on Anna's necklace glow. Beams of late-afternoon sunlight danced across the landscape. The sunlight cast an eerie glow upon the train station and the garbage heap underneath the body of little Anna Goldberg. In three weeks, she would have been nine years old. Her pathetic eyes continued to stare up towards the sky, begging entrance into heaven. Rays of sunlight beamed down from a hole in the clouds overhead. It seemed to Jacob that God was looking down upon this innocent little girl who died only because she was Jewish.

Thinking the same thing, Rachael watched as the body of her only sibling faded away into the golden distance. Ariel was now reduced to anguish. He was only a shell of the man he was before, mentally and emotionally unraveling. He felt as though his heart had been ripped out and thrown away. He recalled the anguish of losing his beloved wife. The pain of losing his adored daughter was unbearable. Terrible thoughts raced through his sweltering mind. *No parent should see a child die.* The grief was crushing his soul. *I could not give her a decent burial!* Sanity crumbled at the edges of Ariel's existence. *How can human beings do such things to other humans?* He cried and moaned throughout the remainder of the trip. Poor Ariel would never be the same person again.

Chapter 14

Witness To A Massacre

The morning of August 19th turned out to be one of the hottest days in recent memory. The train carrying the Salzburg Jews had slowed to a crawl. Everyone on board speculated about the reason for the train's now-deplorable speed. Jacob watched through cracks of the cattle car as the train pulled even with a long line of men wearing striped clothing, who walked parallel with the creeping train through the forest. As the train continued its sluggish pace, Jacob could see that these men looked like they were at death's doorway. Their clothing was shredded and the men were emaciated. They reminded Jacob of the walking dead. These were certainly the most wasted and maltreated people he had seen. Their skin barely covered protruding bones. A few of them did not have shirts on and their ribs stuck out through the paper-thin tissue of their skin. They walked in silence with their heads facing the ground. Several German soldiers with machine guns guarded them. These were not regular German Army soldiers. They wore the black uniform of the dreaded SS.

The prisoners had no tools. They carried nothing. Unlike others on the train, who insisted that it was a work detail, Jacob surmised this was no marching unit of "laborers." These men might have come from a forced labor camp. But, there was no muscle left on them. They were just waiting to die. Making matters worse, the August heat was oppressive. The men were filthy, as though they had slept in the wet forest overnight. Then Jacob saw the golden Star of David patch on the front of almost every man's striped pajamas. *These are almost all Jews! But where did they come from and where are they going?*

Slowly, the train moved into a ravine, in a shadowy place between the rural countryside and the cement buildings of the city. Chirping birds filled the air. A small, but dense layer of fog remained just over the ground. The forest was deep, dense, green, and filled with songbirds. There was a dense grove of conifer trees with a sharp and deep ravine in the center. The train was now inching along. Suddenly, Jacob saw a huge ditch that had recently been carved into the soft soil under this large wooded ravine. The huge, yellow tractor that had created this new ditch was parked in the trees, just up the hill and above the pit. Jacob could see a German machine gun emplacement. As he looked deeper, he saw two more machine gun emplacements, as though they were "guarding" the ditch.

The long line of prisoners continued its inexorable and torturous march towards the ditch. Sometimes, a man would fall and the Germans kicked the man until he stood up again and walked. Sometimes one of the men would not get up. The German then simply stood over the prisoner and shot him in the head. Their shots echoed through the natural valley. The birds stopped chirping with each shot, making the forest a surreal cemetery.

Suddenly, slowly, Jacob put this strange scene into perspective. There could

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be only one reason why the German SS officers were marching the Jews into a forest filled with machine guns and a huge pit. *The Nazis mean to kill all of them!* The Germans seemed oblivious to the train, which was now almost at a complete standstill on a ledge overlooking the densely wooded ravine. The men continued to walk until all of the prisoners were lined up at the edge of the ditch. Jacob's mind was a flurry of activity. *It's strange. None of the prisoners are trying to escape. And, why is it the SS and not regular army soldiers are guarding these men?*

Jacob quietly asked Hershel to come over to his side of the cattle car. He wanted another witness. "Look," Jacob whispered to Hershel. "The Nazis are moving this group of Jews over to the ditch, and they have machine guns set up around it." Hershel moved over and gazed out through some cracks in the side of the cattle car. Several men overheard Jacob and soon most of the Jews on the train were watching this extraordinary event. They pressed against cracks and crevices in the side of the train. No one spoke.

Suddenly, the deafening sound of machine guns rattled the train and everyone in it. Women and children began screaming and shouting. As Jacob and Hershel looked through the cracks at the scene outside, they observed a horror that neither man would ever forget. The group of about sixty to seventy men each fell into the ditch as they were exterminated in a crossfire. As though they were synchronized swimmers, the men each fell, spinning into the ditch below. The Salzburg residents upon the train screamed in horror as the machine guns wiped out the group of emaciated Jews. The sound was deafening. Women and children aboard the train continued to scream after the machine guns became silent. Grown men were weeping. Never had these people seen such blatant horror. Worse yet, the yellow stars on the front of the "uniforms" that the victims wore labeled them as Jews. If the Nazis could murder a large group of Jews in a forest, what were they planning to do with the Salzburg Jews on the train?

Suddenly, a lone prisoner who had somehow evaded the flying bullets ran into the forest, trying to escape. Pieces of his torn and flimsy clothing flew out behind him as he ran. The poor man raced directly towards the train, which was now at a complete stop on the ridge overlooking this incredible tragedy. As he ran, his red and white striped hat fell off behind him. The cap seemed to briefly float on the gentle breeze in the forest, like some huge red and white butterfly, looking for just the right flower upon which to rest.

The Germans were now directing all three machine guns on this poor man, who was fleeing for his life. Still, he continued to run in the direction of the train. Jacob could see that he was a young man, perhaps thirty years old. It was hard to tell his age, since he was so emaciated. His eyes were wide open with fear and his mouth formed an "O" as he gasped for air. His wide brown eyes desperately searched the train for a hiding place. His brown hair was thin on top, showing a reddish scalp. His skin was so thin that his bones showed through his arms and legs. As he reached a small clearing, the man was just meters from the train. He began waving his arms. He shouted in Italian. Jacob could not understand him. The German machine guns rattled away, as the man entered the center of the clearing. Leaves and debris flew up from the ground where bullets hit the ground.

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As he reached the edge of the clearing near the train, the survivor could see that the cars on the train were filled with people. Their fingers stuck out through cracks. Many of them were now shouting encouragement to the wheezing escapee. Jacob suddenly realized that almost everyone was cheering for this poor young man. They implored him to keep running. He was now almost at the train, although he was terribly winded. Jacob believed that if he reached the other side of the train, he would escape. There appeared to be no Germans at all on that side. Bullets now zinged off of his side of the train. The cheering stopped abruptly as the Jews inside the train ducked for cover.

The man was now very close to the train as bullets continued to ricochet off of the railing, pushing up pieces of gravel that surrounded the tracks. Jacob's heart was pounding. He desperately wished that this lone survivor could escape. *He is so close to freedom now, it is a matter of only a few more meters! He can jump between the cattle cars to freedom!* Jacob could now hear the young man gasping for air. He was wheezing with each breath. To Jacob, he sounded like a winded horse, each breath seemed to almost growl out of his chest. The man was grunting something between breaths. At first, Jacob could not understand it. It sounded like Hebrew. Now just in front of the train, it seemed certain that he would make it. But, suddenly, as he reached the gravel, he slipped and fell. His hands snatched out blindly and grabbed at the gravel. His spittle flew upon the dusty ground in front of his face. The man lurched forward to get up and, just as he stood up, he locked eyes with Jacob, who was watching from inside the train.

For a fraction of a moment, the two young men simply gazed into each other's eyes. It seemed to Jacob that time had suddenly stopped. They could have been two men introducing themselves at a Jewish Community Center, getting ready for an afternoon of swimming. Then, abruptly, the man shuddered as a bright red clump of his body burst out of his chest. A machine gun bullet had gone all the way through his body, tearing up internal organs as it went.

The poor man clung there for a moment, still gazing into Jacob's eyes. Then, for a fraction of a second, the man *smiled* at Jacob. Bright red blood came out of his mouth and nostrils, but he was still able to spit out one sentence to Jacob. Although the man's voice gurgled more than spoke, Jacob heard him with clarity. In his dying moment, he spoke to Jacob in Yiddish, "Save them." Another bullet then exploded through the side of the man's head, causing blood and brains to splash into the train. The man's eyes turned up inside of his head, so that only the whites were showing. His limp body fell face forward into the side of the train and then slid down to the ground. The world was suddenly silent. The birds had stopped singing. There was not even a breath of breeze.

After a moment of this anguished silence, the train suddenly jerked forward again. The man's body rolled back face up into the clearing that he had come from. The train moved forward, but nobody said a word. Everyone inside the train was stunned. In the midst of this heavy silence, a high-pitched wailing emerged. An old woman stood screaming over an old man who had slumped to the floor. A stray bullet penetrated through a crack in the side of the train. The old man, who had a long white beard, had been struck directly between his eyes. There was no exit wound on the back of his head, but the bullet had penetrated

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far enough to kill him. His wife now wailed constantly.

Meanwhile, Jacob had not moved. He still looked out of the same slat in the side of the train. His blue eyes stared out blankly at the forest as it passed by. He was virtually in a trance. Thoughts scorched his mind in a dizzying pattern. *Why did the escaping man smile at me, just before he died? What did he see in me? And, what did he mean by saying, "Save them" to me?* The man had surely seen Jacob. Of that he had no doubt. *Is there a connection between this bizarre statement and the statement by his mother's childhood friend, as she too died upon the edge of a forest? She said to my father, "Yours will save many." But, what does it mean? What am I supposed to do? And, does this have anything to do with my nightmare?* Jacob was deeply disturbed by this event. *The man did not know me. Why would he say such a thing?* Rachael's arms were suddenly around his chest, holding him tightly. Her breath was upon his neck. Her lips gently kissed his cheek. Suddenly, in Rachael's embrace, Jacob felt safe and secure. They would die for each other. That much was certain.

All of the Salzburg Jews had seen firsthand the dreadful Nazi killing machine. Their hope for survival had been shattered. Jacob saw it in their faces from that day forward. While many Salzburg Jews had hoped for a new life after the war, most were now resigned to eventual death at the hands of the Nazis. The only question was when and where. If they did not die from disease, then the Nazis would kill them. They also understood, and this was the bitterest pill to swallow, that their children would also die. More than anything, the Salzburg Jews cherished their children. Nothing was more important to them than family and the welfare of their offspring. The belief that not only they, but also their progeny would be destroyed, was too much for most families. They became dispirited shells, alive but not alive. Their laughter had stopped forever.

Chapter 15

Theresienstadt, A New Ghetto

After days of unrelenting suffering aboard the foul train, passing through the endless Czech countryside, they finally reached their destination. The train unloaded at Bohusovice, the nearest train station to Theresienstadt. When the train finally stopped, the doors were opened, allowing the only fresh air that Jacob and his entourage had experienced in almost four days. German soldiers, the dreaded SS, were yelling at the occupants to quickly exit the train. Jacob noticed that many of the Germans covered their mouths. A few even vomited, due to the stench coming from the train's cattle cars. Jacob then realized that he and the other Jews had become accustomed to the smell of death, feces, urine and poor hygiene. It was apparently enough to cause some of their German handlers to be sick.

The Jews of Salzburg were told to line up behind the head of each family. After standing at attention for almost an hour, a German officer identified himself as the head of the Theresin Camp. He announced that the Salzburg Jews were being taken to a new ghetto in a place called Theresin, and that once there they would be assigned to work in a German munitions plant. They were forced to march, through a steady rain for almost four hours, on the road to Theresin.

Some of the older members of the group were unable to walk the entire distance. Every ten to fifteen minutes, Jacob heard a shot ring out behind him. Whenever he turned to look, a German soldier shoved him with a rifle and told him not to look behind. Once, when a shot rang out just behind Jacob, he turned to see who it was. From his brief glance, Jacob could see that the victim was Esther Klein. Esther was a kindly, soft-spoken woman who was at least eighty years old. She lived downstairs in Jacob's apartment building. She gave him Hanukkah gifts every year. During the past year, Jacob took out her garbage, as she had become too feeble. With rheumatoid arthritis, she was unable to keep up with the pace of the march. All that Jacob could see from his brief glance was Esther's face gazing directly down into a large puddle of water. Her eyes were still open, reflecting her shocked expression from the water. Now, she was just another victim of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews.

The SS shot more than twenty-five elderly Salzburg Jews on that long, rainy trek to the camp. Some of them desperately carried their heavy trunks along, as though their possessions meant more than life itself. Only the stronger Salzburg Jews survived the ordeal, finally arriving exhausted at the Theresin camp gate.

Upon arrival, they went to the checking point, called "floodgate." There, they had their personal information recorded by the SS. Then, they were searched. The Nazis were primarily looking for jewelry or money. The Jews were forced to

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give up their suitcases and trunks for inspection. After the search, and minus their valuables, the prisoners were assigned to their "housing."

This new ghetto turned out to be even worse than their first ghetto after leaving Salzburg. It was comprised of a very old manufacturing neighborhood with crumbling apartment buildings surrounding the factories and machine shops. The fact that it was smaller than the first ghetto, but accommodated all of them, was testament to the number of deaths among the Salzburg Jews along the way. In addition to Rachael's sister Anna, twelve more Jews died of sickness on the train. Moshe estimated that they had died from typhus, tuberculosis, heart disease, stroke, cancer and old age. Jacob's father was now treating several people for typhus. He told the others how best to avoid it. As Moshe gazed across the small decaying structure that would be their new home, he wondered how many more would die from disease here.

To make matters worse, the Salzburg Jews were totally isolated now. In the Salzburg ghetto, Jews were still allowed to send and receive mail, use the telegraph office and even talk by phone with friends, relatives and business partners. But now, all of those privileges were gone. The Germans had succeeded in rounding up all of Salzburg's Jews and now the survivors of their harrowing trip were in total captivity. They could get no word out to the rest of the world about their predicament or the conditions they were forced to live within. Had they known what the Germans really had in store for them at that time, surely most of them would have attempted escape. But some of them still believed that they would live on and that one day they would be free again. In fact, many of them believed a rumor that they would live in nearby Prague, a city of great culture. "How bad could it be, to live in such a city?" an old man said to Jacob. "Prague is a wonderful place, full of artists, musicians, scientists and professors. Yes, it won't be too bad for us here," the old man pronounced. "It's only about a hundred kilometers south of us," cried another man.

The town of Theresin – originally a military fortress from the period of Joseph II northwest of Prague – was converted at the end of 1941 by the Nazis into a transit concentration camp where Jews, primarily from the Protectorate, were to be gathered before being further deported to the ghettos and extermination camps farther to the East. Gradually, however, Jews from Germany, Austria, Holland, Denmark and from other occupied territories were deported there. The Nazis wanted to create at Theresin a "model ghetto" whose example would demonstrate their benevolence toward an "inferior race." Before the eyes of the international public they sought to conceal Theresin's function as a way station on the road to death, presenting it as an idyllic spa resort. In this spirit, a propaganda film was to be shot in which young people danced and sang and children drank milk and lemonade. The reality, however, was completely different. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners passed through Theresin. The majority of them, after some period of time, were assigned to transports heading to death camps. For most of those who were deported – namely the children and the elderly – this amounted to being sentenced to death.

Theresienstadt was meant to house 7,000. A times, it was forced to meet the needs of up to 60,000 prisoners. Triple-tiered bunk beds were made and

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every available floor space was used. The sleeping areas were covered with vermin. Rats, fleas, flies, and lice were prevalent. In most cases, fleas could only be removed with kerosene. The housing was separated by sex. Women and children under twelve were separated from the men and the boys over age twelve. Food was also a problem. Rationing with differential treatment to different segments of society was established. Ghetto inhabitants who worked at hard labor received the most food while the elderly received the least. The food scarcity affected the elderly the most. Lack of nourishment, lack of medicines, and general susceptibility to illness made their fatality rate extremely high.

Death was ubiquitous at Theresienstadt. Virtually every morning, bodies were to be found in front of the crumbling buildings. Initially, those who had died were wrapped in a sheet and buried. But the lack of food and medicine, and lack of space soon took its toll. Theresienstadt's population and corpses began to outgrow the possible locations for graves. In September 1942, a crematorium was built. There were no gas chambers built with this crematorium, it was built to dispose of the growing number of corpses. The crematorium could dispose of 190 corpses per day. The ashes were searched for melted gold (from teeth), and then placed in cardboard boxes and stored. They disposed of the ashes by forcing inmates to dump 8,000 cardboard boxes into a pit and dump 17,000 boxes into the Ohre River. Though the mortality rate in the camp was high, the largest fear still lay in the transports to death camps.

Transports left Theresienstadt frequently and each one was made up of one thousand to five thousand Theresienstadt prisoners. The Nazis decided how many people were to be on each transport but they often placed the burden of who was to go, on the Jews themselves. The Council of Elders (AK1 and AK2) became responsible for fulfilling the Nazis' quotas. Life or death became reliant on exclusion from the transports East – or “protection.” Automatically, all members of the AK1 and AK2 were exempted from transports and five members of their closest family. Other major ways to become protected were working in jobs that helped the German war effort, functioning in the Ghetto administration, or being on someone else's list. Finding ways to keep yourself and your family on a protection list, thus off the transports, became the major endeavor of each inhabitant. Nothing was more important. Though some inhabitants were able to find protection, nearly one-half to two-thirds of the population were not protected. For every transport, the bulk of the Ghetto population feared that their name would be chosen. Thus, most of the Salzburg Jews lived in daily fear of being transported to a death camp.

Immediately after German troops crossed the Czech-German border the early morning of March 15, 1939, the remainder of the truncated territory of the Czech lands was declared the so-called “Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia.” From the first day in the Protectorate the Nazi authorities enforced a tough repressive policy against the Jews. They were fired from their jobs. Their property was confiscated, the absurd decrees went so far in this direction that the duty to surrender one's property even applied to radios, bicycles, and skis. Free movement was severely restricted; as of 1940 everyone had to be concentrated in the cramped conditions of the newly demarcated Jewish quarters. In Prague, the former

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Jewish ghetto in Josefov was designated for this purpose. Jews were forbidden entry to cafes, cinemas, theaters, and other public places. There were specially designated hours when Jews could shop, and only in selected shops when there was a limited assortment of goods. After eight o'clock in the evening Jews were forbidden to leave their homes. They were allowed to ride the trams only while seated in the back, and were not allowed on buses at all.

When arriving at Theresienstadt there was a great mixture of how much people knew about their new home. Some had enough information in advance to know how to hide items and valuables. Jacob soon marveled at how others, especially the elderly, were duped by the Nazis into believing that they were going to a resort or spa. Many elderly prisoners actually paid large sums of money for a nice location within their new home. When they arrived, they were housed in the same tiny spaces, smaller than everyone else. Every day saw the arrival of thousands of Jews, deported from their old homes.

The first thing that Jacob discovered was fear. He learned quickly that atrocities and a living hell ruled daily life at Theresienstadt. Jews were shot at random as they went about their daily life. People dropped dead on the streets every day. Hunger was paramount. Everyone was literally starving. The Germans rationed less than 500 calories per person daily to the Theresin Jews. This was delivered in communal style, which meant very long lines. The soup line was sometimes so long that family members would stand in for each other. The soup itself contained no meat, but only a few rotten potatoes or turnips. Bread was often unavailable for days at a time.

While hunger permeated the Theresin Camp, disease devastated it. By early 1941, at least a quarter of the camp had typhus. Without proper sanitation, and with their bodies already ravaged with hunger, the Jews of Theresin were easy targets for typhus. It became almost impossible to avoid contact with lice, and lice bred more typhus. Thus, many of the Jews walking around the ghetto had the telltale rash, high fever and were delirious, all conditions associated with typhus. The infirmary, designed to serve a population the size of only a fraction of the ghetto, was unable to deal with the widespread illness. Even if they had medication, the Theresin residents would have gone back into the vile elements of their contaminated environment.

Jacob and his family were assigned to live in squalor. There was no plumbing and no kitchen. They were forced to use a very large trench behind the barracks as the community latrine. In order to reach the toilet, which was simply a hole placed through sections of plywood, people had to climb down a ladder and then, hanging above this fetid pit, use the "toilet" without the benefit of privacy. Since the pit had no cover, the smell of feces was overpowering. For many of the older residents, and for small children, there was a constant fear of falling from the ladder into the open stinking latrine. Unfortunately, some of the weakest prisoners did.

Rachael, and other girls and young women, were assigned to Barracks Z, in another part of the camp. It was about almost a kilometer away from Jacob's barracks. Neither of them could tolerate separation. They worried constantly about each other. Their love had grown and matured. Despite severe hardship

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and adversity, they had become as one.

On the second night of their stay in Therezin, Jacob defied curfew and went to Rachael's barracks. Searchlights pierced the darkness from every angle. Jacob had to be exceptionally careful. Prisoners were shot for being outside of their assigned barracks after curfew. He moved from shadow to shadow, underneath watchtowers and machine gun emplacements. Jacob was dirty, smelly, unshaven and weak from starvation. But nothing could deter him from being with Rachael this night. He crept through the dark and, in silence, he entered her barracks. The other females shrieked their fear when they saw him. But, Rachael smiled broadly and ran to him. Upon seeing each other, they embraced tightly. Jacob could see that Rachael was very thin. Her long shiny hair was dirty and frazzled. And, her teeth were yellow and the bones in her arms were showing through her skin. Jacob still thought that she was the most beautiful sight in the universe.

Jacob and Rachael held each other for a long time. Finally, they pulled away from their tight embrace and looked into each other's eyes. "We must see my father," Rachael insisted. "His building is not far away." Jacob resisted initially. He wanted desperately to continue to caress and kiss his beloved. But Rachael's insistence concerned him. *Something important is on her mind.* They walked out into the darkness together.

Rachael and Jacob moved through the shadows from her barracks to her father's. At one point, the ubiquitous searchlights found them between buildings. "Freeze," whispered Jacob. "No movement," he said to Rachael. Their hearts pounded heavily while they waited to be caught. Jacob's mind was reeling with thoughts of punishment and death. *There is no way that they cannot see us! We are caught! Oh my God, they are going to kill us!* It seemed as though the light was upon them forever. Jacob expected to hear gunfire and shouting at any moment. *What are they waiting for? Why don't they just shoot us now? Oh dear God in Heaven, we are going to die tonight!*

Suddenly, without any shots or even shouting – the searchlight moved away. They exhaled loudly together. Jacob did not realize that he had been holding his breath since the light had found them. He suddenly found himself dizzy. *Am I going to pass out?* Rachael grabbed his arm and pulled him towards the nearest barracks. Wherever he looked, he saw a starburst pattern. *Are my eyes damaged?* Momentarily, his vision returned to normal. *I almost passed out from fear. How can I be a leader of men? I feel so ashamed.* Rachael hugged Jacob quickly and ran to her father's barracks.

As Jacob and Rachael entered her father's barracks, they were met by a wave of hot, foul-smelling air. The smell was a veritable cornucopia of perspiration, vomit, urine, feces and something else that Jacob now found familiar – the odor of death. They had to walk through most of the building in order to reach Rachael's father. Some of the men whistled at Rachael. Jacob turned to look, ready to defend her. Instead, he saw that she had a slight smile on her face. Even in this deplorable condition, with filthy hair, Rachael was beautiful. She seemed to shine with an inner beauty. In a way, Jacob also appreciated the attention that she received. Finally, they reached someone who resembled her father. Jacob

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hardly recognized him. He lay upon a bunk with five other men. But, this man looked twenty years older than Ariel. He appeared to be in his eighties, with terribly wrinkled skin and eyes sunken deep into his forehead. Wrinkled, gray skin sagged off his arms and legs.

"Hello Ariel," said Jacob, trying his best to put a happy face on the situation. He hoped that his attempt at a smile worked. Ariel's bunk was fouled with urine and feces. Jacob found it difficult just to be near him. As Rachael had warned, Ariel looked as though death was close to his doorstep. For a moment, Jacob did not recognize him. Ariel, having lost his wife and now recently his younger daughter, looked dreadful. He was totally unkempt, thin as a rail and unshaven. The skin around his eyes and his eyes themselves had turned a shade of mustard yellow. His brown eyes protruded out, staring into eternity. To Jacob, Ariel now looked like a living, talking, skeleton. It frightened him badly. *I fear that I may never stop seeing his face this way!*

Ariel managed a faint smile for his children. However, it faded quickly. Rachael fussed over her father in a vain attempt to make him comfortable. "Are you drinking enough water, father?" Ariel offered her a disapproving stare. Jacob wondered privately if Ariel would survive the week. "I miss you so much," whispered Rachael. Ariel looked up at Rachael and smiled. He tried to say something, but his hoarse, raspy voice could not produce the desired words. Instead, Ariel pushed out his arm and placed it upon Rachael's. For a moment, Jacob thought that he could see through the thin, waxy skin, right to the bone. The wrinkled hand was filthy and covered with brown age spots. He managed another faint smile.

Then, looking directly at Jacob, Ariel tried to speak. He had given up on life and his health was failing. He had to inhale deeply in order to gain enough strength to speak. Jacob had to place his ear inches from Ariel's face in order to hear. His breath smelled of demise. With all of his strength, Ariel grabbed Jacob's arm and whispered into his ear, "Take care of my daughter." This was his last wish for Jacob before dying. He then fell back upon his bunk, unconscious.

Jacob promised, "I will."

Rachael was almost hysterical. She had lost her mother, her sister, and now her father was dying. It was all too much for her. She cried and trembled over Ariel's dying body. On the way back to Rachael's barracks, Jacob tried to comfort her. Yet, she could not stop crying.

Three nights later, Jacob again visited Rachael's building. When he arrived, Rachael grabbed Jacob. "Come with me, please. I need to be with you now." She told him that they had to go to the schoolhouse, where she had been assigned to work. Lost inside the shadowy corner of the schoolhouse, Jacob and Rachael embraced.

"I couldn't stand being away from you. Oh, God, I love you so much," Jacob said as he tightened his embrace upon Rachael. He looked into Rachael's dreamy brown eyes. They too were beginning to show dark rings from starvation. But to Jacob, they were still as beautiful and as comforting as ever.

"We'll have all the privacy that we need," whispered Rachael. She was right. The school building was locked after classes were over. But, as a teacher,

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Rachael had a key. Inside the building, Rachael found a corner away from the windows.

Despite Rachael's frantic concern over her ailing father, she also desperately needed to be with Jacob. It was a reminder of who they were. She thought about how much her life had changed because of him. *I am no longer that independent girl. Now, and forever more, I am part of "Jacob and Rachael." Although that is an entity consisting of two different souls, we are as one. Our destiny is locked together.*

Rachael softly whispered, "I will stay by your side forever, Jacob. No matter where we go or what the Nazis do to us, I will always be here with you. I am yours forever."

Jacob lay next to Rachael and stared into the rafters of the school building. His mind was spinning. *Life can be so beautiful and so terrifying at the same time. How alone we are! How painful it is to be trapped within this shell of bone and muscle! What peculiar, sad creatures we are. We are a universe within our soul, inside a universe of souls. Life is so much more precious than I thought it was. The threat of death now permeates my senses. Darkness unfolds its evil intention all around me. Yet, I am unable to make an end of it. I believe that I am supposed to do something important. The signs cannot be wrong. Yet, I am confused. I am blind in the most important time to see. What am I supposed to do?*

Chapter 16

Avoiding Deportation

As the Nazis worked to transform Theresin Camp into a death camp called “Theresienstadt,” the population of Prague and nearby villages watched on. Though a few residents attempted to give the Jews assistance in small ways, their mere presence increased the restrictions on Jews’ mobility. There would soon come a day when the Theresienstadt residents would be evacuated and the Jews would be isolated and completely dependent on the Germans. Meanwhile, deportations continued on a regular basis.

Jews who were healthy and strong were assigned to work in the nearby munitions factory, or to build new highways for Germany. Those who were not strong and able-bodied were assigned for “relocation.” No Jews were heard from after “relocation.” By now, many Jews had heard the stories of death camps where Jews were gassed to death. The more that they heard about those death camps, the more they feared relocation. It was now considered a death sentence. The Germans enticed Jews with lies to apply for transports, since “they could then be reunited with family members already in the process of relocation.” Only a few Jews could be tricked into this madness.

On the outside, the ghetto Theresienstadt was gaining a reputation for culture, due to its famous prisoners, and because of visits by Red Cross officials. There was a Jewish school, a Jewish infirmary and quite an astonishing camp orchestra. Many of the orchestra members held prestigious positions with some of the foremost symphonies and orchestras of Europe. Some of Europe’s most famous musicians, conductors, scientists, physicians and artists resided at Theresienstadt at one time or another. However, within this serene facade lay a real concentration camp. Nearly sixty thousand Jews inhabited an area originally designed for only seven thousand. They lived in extremely close quarters. Disease and starvation was a constant serious concern. However, life and death within Theresienstadt soon became focused on the frequent transports to a new camp in Poland called “Auschwitz.” Remaining off of deportation lists was as essential as breathing. Life itself depended upon this.

For the Salzburg Jews, the months at Theresin passed in constant fear. They understood that the Germans had concentration camps much worse than Theresin and they realized that Theresin was only a holding place for Jews who would eventually be “deported” to their deaths. Thus, each day that they did not receive a deportation notice was one day longer that they could live. Some, who had already lost close family members to deportation, volunteered to go. They held bleak hope that somehow they would still be reunited with their loved ones, many who had already been murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Chelmno, Belzec, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka. Alarmingly, more and more prisoners desired the opportunity to rejoin their loved ones in death.

Chapter 17

A Red Cross Visit

Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, Jacob, Rachael and their parents assimilated into the community at Therezin Camp. Jacob was assigned to work at the munitions plant nearby, making eighty-eight millimeter shells for German Guns. Jacob's father saw patients at the hospital and was a member of the Council of Elders. His mother and Rachael volunteered as teachers at the Jewish School. Everyone made himself busy – except for Ariel. Ariel rejected work orders and remained in his bunk nearly all of the time. His poor health continued to decline. There, he waited to rejoin his wife and daughter.

On a sparkling clear late September day, the camp commander visited the Jewish school. His name was General Gerhard Strobel. Strobel was a paunchy middle-aged man fighting off a mid-life crisis. His wife and children also lived on the camp grounds. Yet, rumors told of Strobel taking attractive women prisoners as sex slaves in his office. Rachael stood in line with Hanna and the rest of the school staff as Strobel reviewed them. She looked down, refusing to make eye contact with him. As Strobel walked across the room, he smiled at the women. He then had the children lined up and inspected them, as well.

One by one, Strobel gazed into the faces of the teachers and teacher-aids. He suddenly stopped when he saw Rachael. In amazement, the staff watched as Strobel fawned himself over Rachael. He complimented her dress, then her face, and then her eyes. "You do not look like a Jew," he said. "What is your name?"

"I am Rachael Goldberg," she replied in a soft, low voice.

"Yes, indeed," he was now breathing into her face, His breath smelled of sauerkraut and beer. "You look Aryan," he said as everyone gaped in disbelief. Rachael had dark hair and brown eyes. She could never be mistaken for an Aryan. Strobel's foul breath repelled her and Rachael pulled back. Suddenly, Strobel realized that everyone in the room was staring at him. He cleared his throat abruptly and said, "Prepare for a Red Cross inspection in October." With that, he lit a cigarette and disappeared through a cloud of smoke.

Strobel slammed the door behind him. For a long time, the other teachers simply stared at Rachael. Clearly, Strobel had taken more than a casual interest in her. She was suddenly terrified. Leaving the room in tears, Rachael said to the others, "Whatever happens to me, please keep the school going."

On October 7th, both Rachael and Jacob received orders that they were to present themselves the next day at the dining room at precisely 10:30 a.m. They were to wear their best clothes. If they had none, clothing would be provided. Some of the munitions workers told Jacob that they also had received the same orders. To Jacob, something was wrong with this arrangement, but he could not be certain what the Nazis were up to.

As Rachael saw Jacob enter the dining room that day, she ran to meet him.

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They embraced and kissed as though they were alone. Suddenly, a German officer with a megaphone told everyone to stop talking and sit down. German soldiers brought piles of nice clothing into the room. They began to match people with correct clothing sizes. There were about sixty or seventy young Jews in the dining room. The first thing that Jacob noticed was that almost everyone in the room was in good health. That, in itself, was out of place at the camp. There was no chronic coughing, no open wounds, no obvious bruises and no overt evidence of sickness. He also noticed that unlike the average Therezin prisoner, most of these Jews looked strong. They were thin, some emaciated. But, the Germans made sure that nice clothing hid the evidence of malnutrition. For some of them, it was the first new clothing that they had in years. They were again ordered to stop talking as Strobel entered the room.

Strobel walked to a standing microphone and began to gaze out at the prisoners. Then he saw Rachael. He stared at her for what seemed to be an eternity. His intentions toward her were obvious. Jacob found it difficult to restrain his anger. Strobel then looked at Jacob and his smile turned to a frown. Finally, he turned on the microphone and began to speak.

“The Red Cross officials will arrive at 12:00. In a moment, you will be instructed to move out into the front terrace, between the dining room and the barracks. There, you may eat as much as you like. However, there are some rules that you must follow. First, you will say nothing to the Red Cross about being treated poorly. Second, you will deny that diseases exist within the camp. Third, you will say nothing about deportation or any of the rumors you may have heard about other camps. Fourth, you will tell the Red Cross that everyone who wishes to work has a job waiting for him or her. You will tell the Red Cross that working in the camp makes you feel productive and useful. Fifth, you will tell the Red Cross that everyone else you know is being treated fairly and in accordance with the Geneva Convention.”

Then Strobel's expression changed. An evil smirk raced across his face. He spoke next in almost a whisper, “If any of you say something negative about the camp to the Red Cross, I will know about it. And, if that happens, I assure you that not only you, but also your entire family will be immediately deported to a camp that makes Therezin feel like a hotel. So, if you want to stay alive, you will tell the Red Cross nothing!” Strobel turned and quickly exited the dining room.

Rachael and Jacob looked at each other in amazement. “What is happening here, Jacob?” asked Rachael.

“It is a setup, Rachael,” whispered Jacob. They want the international community to believe that this camp is a model community. They want the world to believe that Jews are being treated fairly here. If we tell the Red Cross the truth about this disgusting lie, we will all die, and our families will die with us.”

At the next table, someone said to Jacob, “We will all die at the hands of the Nazis anyway.” He introduced himself as David Berg. “And this is my wife, Emily, he said. The couple appeared to be in their mid twenties. David was tall and thin, with a dark complexion and jet-black hair. He had a very thin, dark mustache. Emily was petite, with red hair and freckles everywhere. They spoke

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of their families for a while. David and Emily were from Danzig. They had been married for six years. David was a history professor at the University of Danzig. Emily was a nurse at the university hospital in Danzig, until Jews were forbidden to treat non-Jews. This was the third “camp” that they had been forced into by the Nazis. Both of their parents died from typhus in Therezin during the past summer. They both had older siblings who lived in other cities. They had not heard from them since arriving at Therezin.

At precisely 12:00 noon, the group was marched into the terrace in front of the dining room. What they saw there was nothing less than astounding. Dozens of colorful tables and chairs were arranged throughout the wide courtyard. Fine linen tablecloths and napkins made the area resemble a fancy restaurant. Long serving tables were overflowing with meats, smoked fish, herring and cheeses of various types. Other serving tables were covered with fresh breads, rolls, nuts and a wide variety of fresh fruits. Other tables displayed dozens of cakes and pies. Fresh flowers adorned each table. It could have been the charming terrace of a fine hotel in Vienna or Berlin.

Jacob looked around the plaza in total amazement. Here, a group of starving people stood before a feast appropriate for royalty. He was astounded. *This could be a scene from a wealthy family's wedding.* To top off the arrangement, the Jewish orchestra was there playing a Beethoven symphony. Jacob noticed some of the people in his group were actually pinching themselves, to make sure that this was not a dream. *I have been starving for so long. Every day, my stomach hurts from lack of food. And now, a feast is prepared for me – as long as I contribute to the Nazi charade. I should walk away now, just to spite them. Or, I should tell the Red Cross the truth about how they are starving and killing us.* But, Jacob knew that the Nazis would simply punish Rachael and his parents if he refused to participate in their lie.

They sat at a table with David and Emily. After a few minutes, Jacob noticed that some members of the orchestra were staring at him. Jacob and Rachael were members of the orchestra. Rachael was third viola and Jacob was second violin. But today, the Germans demanded that they eat like gluttons in front of their starving friends. *How can I ever obtain their forgiveness? I should have refused.* Now, Rachael and Jacob were to fill themselves with food, while their starving orchestra friends could only watch! It made both of them feel very guilty.

“How can we eat while our comrades continue to starve?” asked Rachael, pointing to the orchestra.

“This is horrible,” Emily added. Then, Rachael asked one of the guards if the orchestra would be allowed to eat.

The guard laughed at Rachael for a long time, then growled at her. “Shut up and eat, or we’ll find someone else to take your place.”

Rachael’s mind was spinning. She was starving and she desperately wanted food. *I should refuse to eat. Yet, everyone is starving here. It's not fair to them. What should I do?* She looked at Jacob for guidance. But, he was looking at the orchestra. Finally, the overpowering urge to eat was undeniable. *How can a starving person resist the temptation to eat? Was it not beyond a person's ability*

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to control? Rachael could no more refuse to eat this food than she could stop breathing. She understood that she was badly malnourished and would soon contract serious diseases if she did not increase her food intake. She had lost control. *I will not die. I will live.*

Jacob and his table-mates watched as the white-clothed Red Cross personnel assembled in front of the commissary. "Look," said Jacob. "Everyone here is fairly young and looks in pretty good shape."

"You're right Jacob," David replied. "The Germans want the Red Cross to believe that all of the Jews here are happy and healthy. I hate being a part of this farce!" he thundered.

A guard heard David's remark and slapped him hard, across his face. "Shut up and eat," ordered the guard. Blood dripped from David's nose. "Wipe that up immediately!" snarled the soldier.

David pressed his pure white linen napkin into his nose to staunch the flow of blood. Nearby, an argument broke out between the soldier who had hit David and his sergeant. "I told you not to hit them in front of the visitors! God damn you!" The offending soldier's cheeks were bright red. "Now, get that bloody napkin out of here," thundered the sergeant.

Walking slowly towards the young Jews from the Commissary, Red Cross officials began to flow into the courtyard. It was a sunny day. Their white coats flew about in the strong breeze. Soon, they sat amongst the Jews on parade, asking questions and offering cursory examinations. Eventually, one of them sat with the Jews in Rachael and Jacob's group.

An old Swedish physician, with a stethoscope wrapped around his neck, approached Jacob. "How is your condition, young man?" The doctor looked like he was a hundred years old. He had but a few wispy white hairs upon his bald head, which was covered with age spots, wrinkles and what appeared to be small skin tumors. "Is there any sickness here? How are you treated by the Germans?"

The old man asked rapid-fire questions, beginning a new question before he heard an answer to the previous question. *Is he doing this on purpose? Is he in league with the Nazis? That would explain why he ignores our answers!* "Is anyone here beaten?" Jacob and Rachael stared at each other, afraid to say anything. "Are you treated fairly by the Germans?" Jacob chuckled at the irony. He looked at his table-mates who were shoveling food as fast as they could swallow it. "Do they conform to the Geneva Convention here?" By now, no one bothered to pay attention to the old man. All of the young people at Jacob's table were busy eating. Jacob glanced around while filling his mouth with food. *The Nazis are smart. They understood that starving people will stuff their faces with food and be unable to speak clearly. They knew exactly how we would react. I am so ashamed.* "May we examine you?" asked the old doctor. No one answered.

Throughout the multitude of Red Cross questions, the Jews of Therezin gave vague and indirect responses. Rarely did anyone reply with much more than "yes" or "no." The full horror of the camp would remain a secret. Yet, the Red Cross should have been suspicious that emaciated people were eating like royalty. With food like this, how could they look so malnourished? The Red

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Cross offered only the most cursory examinations of the group. After they had eaten, the Nazis ordered the prisoners to strip naked, and then to run in circles around the plaza. The experience was humiliating, particularly because hundreds of people in the entire camp were watching. As Jacob assumed, the examinations produced nothing out of the ordinary. *They examine the youngest, strongest and healthiest among us. Do they assume that everyone in the camp is in a similar condition?*

Later in the day, the Red Cross examined the infirmary. Almost no one was there. Just one day earlier, the infirmary, overseen by Jacob's father, was overwhelmed with dozens of prisoners near death. Typhus, tuberculosis, malaria and pneumonia were rampant. Many of these poor people were at death's door. In fact, throughout the entire camp, dozens died from typhus each day. Many people also died from malnutrition each day. Bodies were to be found regularly on the paths between the barracks, or on the path to the commissary. Although Jews died by the thousands at Theresienstadt, today was different. When the international Red Cross arrived, there were less than a dozen patients in the hospital. The staff of the hospital had been ordered by the Camp Commandant not to say a word about typhus, or any other diseases, with the Red Cross. If they did, a swift death would be awaiting them and their families, after the Red Cross had departed.

Commandant Strobel told Moshe Silverman that his family was in danger. Earlier that morning, he had stormed into Moshe's office with a terrible order. "Oh, yes, Dr. Silverman, I know all about your Jacob and Hanna. I even know about Jacob's girl, Rachael. Say anything negative at all and I assure you that they will be dead by nightfall." Moshe was torn between telling the world about the horror of this place and protecting his beloved family. All day, he struggled with this ethical dilemma. Almost nothing could keep Moshe from telling the truth to the international community about how badly Jews had been treated at Theresienstadt. He asked God for guidance. *Dear, sweet God, what should I do? If I tell the truth, the international community might understand the terrible affliction that we have been assigned by Nazi Germany. But, what if the Red Cross refused to report it? I would have assured a death sentence for those whom I love the most. My God, what should I do?*

Late in the day of their visit, when the Red Cross asked him about how well the Jews of Theresienstadt were treated, Moshe looked down at the floor and told them that they were treated fairly. *Dear God, I have lied for the Nazi bastards! But, how can I be responsible for my family's death?*

In the end, no one told the Red Cross the truth about their hellish existence in Theresienstadt. No one told of the starvation, beatings, forced labor and rampant disease. No one spoke of the thousands of deaths from malnutrition or the complete lack of medication. The Red Cross was paraded through a hospital that was clean and neat, with few patients. The Red Cross leadership walked through the clean, neat Jewish school where Rachael taught children who would soon be sent on their way to death. The Jewish orchestra entertained the Red Cross, playing Bach, Mendelssohn, Mozart and Wagner. And, they saw a large group of young Jews eating a meal fit for a king. Throughout this, not one member of the

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Red Cross asked if they ate such wonderful food every day. No member of the Red Cross asked about the open wounds and sores from countless beatings by Nazis. It was the most incredible travesty that Jacob could imagine.

On the bus returning to Prague, members of the Red Cross staff discussed their pleasant trip into the countryside, northwest of Prague – to the “transit” camp called Theresienstadt. The camp seemed to be a model of effectiveness and efficiency. The Jews had voiced no complaints and, despite being thin, seemed very well fed. They saw children playing, visited a model school and toured a quiet infirmary. Late in the day, Jacob watched from his barracks as the Red Cross bus departed, sending clouds of dust into the warm autumn evening. The late afternoon sun shed golden light behind the motorcade. He then looked to the right and saw several large bulldozers pushing dirt around on a large hill behind the camp. He wondered absently why the SS was moving a lot of dirt around behind the camp’s wire border.

One day earlier, Moshe was preparing to leave the infirmary. It was evening, at almost the same time of day. The commandant’s car arrived without warning. There were hundreds of patients squeezed into the small, filthy space that the Germans called an infirmary. It was a living nightmare. So many were dying, thought Moshe, and there was almost nothing he could do to save them.

Commandant Strobel stopped him at the door. “I’m clearing out most of your patients tonight, Silverman,” he barked.

Moshe looked up at him in surprise. “What do you mean?” asked Moshe. “Are you are moving them to another hospital?”

At that thought, Strobel stopped and began to chuckle. Apparently the thought was very funny as he laughed until tears were flowing down his face. Finally, he stopped and his face became serious. “Silverman, I’m helping them.” With that, he turned and left the infirmary.

Moshe decided to stay and try to protect his patients, but he was ordered to leave by an SS officer. “If you don’t go back to the barracks, we will lock you up in a detention cell,” he snapped at Moshe. Moshe went back to his barracks and his family. When he returned to the infirmary the next day, almost all of his patients were gone. Only the least sick remained. Those departed included the old and the young, men and women, children of all ages and people with a variety of disorders. The group included innocent husbands, fathers, brothers, sisters and even entire families.

After Moshe had left the infirmary, soldiers entered the makeshift hospital. They began shouting and screaming orders. An older officer walked around the infirmary and selected patients that looked to be the healthiest. This officer had a handkerchief constantly covering his mouth. He apparently feared catching a disease from the mostly Jewish infirmary population. Only about two dozen made this “healthy” list. The officer then told everyone else to walk outside and into a waiting truck. Slowly, dozens of sick prisoners left the infirmary and piled into the waiting truck. Some had to be carried into the truck. Some were wheeled up to the truck in a wheelchair. One-by-one, the soldiers unplugged tubes attached to their bodies and pushed them into the truck.

The only nurse on duty at that time was a middle-aged woman named Helene.

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With her flowing red hair trailing behind, Helene was a whirlwind in the infirmary. She argued vociferously with the soldiers, who acted as though she was invisible. She brought the officer back in to the infirmary.

“Why are you doing this?” she exclaimed. “These people cannot be moved.” Her anger was overwhelming and the officer became impatient.

“Shut up, you stupid Jewess!” he ordered. He slapped Helene’s face as hard as he could. She fell down, but almost immediately got back up.

Helene continued shouting at the German officer, unabated. “I’m telling you that some of these people will die if you move them!” she screamed. With that comment the officer stopped, then looked at the soldiers. Many had smiles on their faces and one of the soldiers giggled. Suddenly, Helene knew what was happening. Her face, which was filled with anger – fell slack. She realized that the sick patients and those who were suffering badly from malnutrition were being removed from the camp for the Red Cross visit. *They mean to kill the sickest of them! Oh my God, they are planning to kill them!*

Helene could no longer control her anger. She screamed at the Germans. “How can you kill innocent people like this? They have done nothing wrong. They are only sick. How can you butcher these innocent people?” She was now screaming in the officer’s face. “You must stop this NOW!” she insisted.

The officer, a young man named Carl Hess from Munich who was a postal worker before the war, slowly pulled his handgun out of its holster. Without the slightest hesitation, he shot Helene in the forehead. Her eyes curved up into their sockets as blood and brains shot out of the back of her head, landing on the white wall of the infirmary. Helene’s body slumped back to the wall and then down slowly to the floor. The bloody mess dripped down the wall slowly. Holstering his weapon, Hess turned and walked away, offering a comment, “stupid Jewish bitch” as he closed the door. Blood pulsed out from Helene’s head for a few moments longer, forming a bright red puddle upon the wooden floor. “Clean it up fast,” screamed Hess as he walked away.

The truck had to make four trips from the hospital around the camp and up a large hill where bulldozers had opened a huge trench in the ground. When the last truckload of prisoners arrived, the soldiers who had been waiting beside the bulldozers ran into action. They ordered the prisoners out of the truck. The SS used snarling dogs, threats, whips and even knives to motivate the prisoners. But many of them were physically unable to move out of the truck themselves. So the guards jumped into the truck and began throwing people out on the ground. Some of the patients were children. The guards picked small children up by an arm or a leg and threw them out on the ground. Some of these children were so ill and malnourished that they lacked the energy to cry. Instead, they simply stared up in fear as more and more of the group was thrown onto the ground above the trench.

The prisoners were then told to line up at the edge of the large trench. Able-bodied adults carried children and those unable to stand with them. The infirm prisoners stumbled and staggered up to the edge. When they reached the top of the trench, they looked down into it with horror. Inside, on the ground, were the bodies of some of their fellow patients from the hospital. Arriving in an earlier truck, they had already been shot. Most of them appeared dead, although

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some of them moved and groaned or cried. Obviously, the Germans had found a quick way to empty the hospital of malnourished patients.

One of the patients in this last group was a very bright and beautiful twelve-year-old girl named Sarah. Sarah was exceptionally bright, with shiny, blonde hair, blue eyes and the face of an angel. No one would have guessed that she was Jewish from her appearance. Her mother had joked for years that “the mailman brought Sarah,” since her brothers and sisters all had dark hair and brown eyes. Now, at age twelve, Sarah was an orphan. All four of her siblings had contracted typhus and died at Theresienstadt. It was a miracle that Sarah had survived, according to Moshe. She was, however, badly malnourished. Her bones showed through her skin, which had turned a yellowish color.

Sarah was from Prague. She excelled in school, played the oboe rather well and had a natural knack for foreign languages. Sarah planned to become a teacher. Teaching children was her life's dream. She was forced to watch as her parents had been shot while the Germans were moving Jews from the Prague ghetto into the Theresien camp. It happened for no reason at all, Sarah thought. While they were marching from a train, her father stopped to light a cigarette. His lighter was low on fuel and did not work immediately. The soldiers screamed at him in German to keep moving, but he did not understand. He only spoke Czech and Yiddish. He had no idea why they were shouting at him. Sarah's father continued to try to light his cigarette. Sarah's mother raced back to his side to encourage her father to stop his delay. Suddenly, without saying a word, one of the soldiers pulled up his machine gun and shot Sarah's parents many times. They died almost immediately. Sarah did not even have time to say good-bye. By the time she and her siblings reached Theresienstadt, they were all infected.

Now, badly malnourished from typhus and lightheaded, Sarah stood at the edge of this unearthly precipice. Her heart was pounding. She wanted to be anywhere else than where she was. She thought of what she could have done with her life. *What good now are outstanding grades in reading, math and science?* She thought perhaps that she could help children learn. Now, for reasons that she could not understand, German soldiers were shouting and aiming guns at her. Sarah looked up. The golden sun was setting behind the hills directly in front of her. Her sparkling, bright blue eyes reflected the golden sunlight. The sky was filled with shades of yellow, pink and blue. The warm October sunshine felt good upon Sarah's face, warming her against the cool breeze. She thought of her parents and her brothers and sister. *How can I be the only member of my family left alive? Why have the Germans done this to us?* She missed her friends from home. A gust of chilly wind blew her fine blonde hair into her face. She absently pulled her hair back. She had been so excited about playing her oboe in the school orchestra. *Now, I will never play music again.* As tears gathered in her eyes, Sarah thought that despite the evil of the German soldiers, there was so much good in life. But, more than anything, she missed her parents.

Sarah was so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear the orders of the German officer behind her. Suddenly, Sarah felt something huge, hot and

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very forceful hit her from behind. A bullet tore through Sarah's back with such force that it pushed her down into the trench, tumbling head over heels. It seemed to take forever to reach the bottom. Sarah's chest felt hot and warm and it was suddenly hard to breathe. She fell on top of dozens of bodies in the trench. She tried to move herself to an upright position, but found that her legs would not move. She could move her arms but not her legs. Sarah was very confused about this. The pain in her chest began to get worse. Bright red blood was coming out from her mouth and nose. Underneath, she just barely made out the muffled sound of a child crying. Sarah recognized the child from her cries. It was Raisl, a three-year-old from the hospital who also had malnutrition. Sarah tried desperately to reach her, but without the use of her legs, it seemed impossible. More bodies fell upon her, trapping her inside a writhing mountain of human suffering. She could hear the Germans talking above her. A horrible smell began to waft up into the air from the people below.

Gathering all of her strength, Sarah pushed her broken and bleeding body around and looked up at the top of the trench. Her vision was beginning to diminish, but she could see and hear the soldiers above. They were laughing. *My chest hurts so much! I think I am bleeding too fast. How can I stop the blood from coming out?* Some of the German soldiers stopped talking long enough to spit into the trench. Sarah could not hear what they were talking about, so she looked at the sky instead. Fluffy golden clouds drifted below an azure sky, rapidly changing into shades of pink and purple. Sara could still hear a few people below her struggling to reach the top of the pile of bodies.

"Help me, please help me," pleaded an old woman. But there was nothing that Sarah could do with her legs immobilized. *I feel so weak! I can hardly move at all.* Moments later, Sarah's vision and hearing began to fail. The world was turning cold and gray. *It is so cold. I can't seem to stop shivering.* Sarah could see stars emerging as dusk arrived. She continued to stare up at the darkening sky. She trembled as a great weakness overwhelmed her.

Finally, Sarah began to cry. "Mama, Papa... where have you gone?" Soon, she was too weak to cry or move. She closed her eyes and thought about home.

The German soldiers noticed that many of the patients from the hospital were still alive in the trench. Some of them called out for help. Now, the German soldiers began to shoot at the wounded patients in the trench. Sarah noticed how two or three of them smiled and shouted to each other. *Why do they enjoy killing us? What have we done to them?* She also noticed that a few of the Germans could not look into the trench as they discharged their guns. They grimaced and looked away while firing. She somehow understood that they did not wish to hurt these innocent people, but were forced to do it. After several more minutes, the shooting stopped, as did the sounds of wounded people around and under Sarah.

Moments later, Sarah felt something dry hit her face. It went into her eyes, her mouth and her ears. She spit it out as best she could. But, she had almost run out of strength. She opened her eyes and saw that it was now twilight. Again, something fell down upon her that was dry and spread over her as it hit. Far above, she heard the motors of bulldozers, hard at work. It was difficult for Sara

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to think now. She felt colder than ever before. She longed for a warm blanket. Again, something hard hit her. It was a rock that fell from above. Then, more and more piles of dirt fell upon her. She realized that the Germans were filling the trench in with dirt. Sarah understood that she was being buried alive, along with the others from the hospital. More dirt fell, this time into her mouth. Sara tried to spit it out, but discovered that she was too weak. Her strength was gone. The coldness seemed to go right into her bones. She could hear someone far away saying "God damn Jews." *Why can't I finish school? Why can't I play my oboe? Why can't I live? Why can't I fall in love and have a family?*

Sarah's heart stopped at 6:51 p.m. on October 6, 1941. People who hated her because of her religion had destroyed her entire family, depriving her of a future and the future of her progeny. Whatever she and her children might have accomplished for their community disappeared. She joined the souls of the others from the Theresienstadt infirmary on that beautiful October evening. Now, there was nothing but darkness and silence.

The Red Cross departed in a motorcade from Therezin camp near sunset. As they were rounding a hill near the camp, one of the doctors saw bulldozers busily moving earth around the back of the camp. He said to another doctor, "What are they building up there?" The other man looked at him strangely, replying "I don't know and I don't care. All I know is that I want a hot bath and warm sheets tonight. I hate visiting these Jew camps. Let them rot for all I care." The first doctor began to protest, and then suddenly stopped, glancing at the Gestapo officer on the other side of the aisle who was staring at him.

Minutes later, the trench had been covered. It was a desolate area, between the camp and a riverbed. The earth turned easily there. Nothing remained of the hundreds of patients from the Theresienstadt infirmary. Had the Red Cross investigated the bulldozers busily moving earth behind the camp, they would have discovered the site of a mass murder. But, Commandant Strobel had taken great care to make his camp a model for the Red Cross to see. Now, at twilight, puffy clouds glowed orange and pink. Strobel stood upon the covered trench as a soft, cool breeze passed over the top of the pit. He casually lit a cigarette, inhaling the smoke deeply into his lungs. One of the German soldiers working with a shovel quietly said to another soldier, "Some of them were still alive!" Commandant Strobel gave the soldier a nasty glance. His evil stare frightened the young man and he backed away silently. Strobel's last order to his troops as they buried the remains of the infirmary was, "Save your ammunition. Just bury them." Some soldiers were happy to obey. Thus, many of the prisoners from the infirmary, including a bright, talented girl named Sarah were buried alive.

Chapter 18

A Forbidden Wedding

The Salzburg Jews blended in with tens of thousands of Jews from all of Europe imprisoned at Theresienstadt. Time passed agonizingly slowly, as the seasons drifted on. Moshe was still responsible for the infirmary, and worked with a number of new physicians and nurses as the prisoner population soared. He also remained a member of the Council of Elders, the German-devised leadership group for the Jewish prisoners. Hanna and Rachael organized the Jewish school and taught several grades. Jacob, like most able-bodied men, worked in a nearby factory. He stood next to a machine that made bullet casings all day. And so, time passed at Theresienstadt.

The prisoners were allowed to receive and send mail. At first, Hanna received mail from her relatives in Poland and Palestine. It seemed that their plight was not much better than living in Theresienstadt. Hanna's sister in Poland wrote that they had been forced out of Krakow and were now living hundreds of miles away, in a ghetto in Warsaw. She wrote that Jews from all over Poland had been rounded up and forced into squalor in this dilapidated section of Warsaw. "It sounds a lot like the ghetto we left," remarked Hanna. Her cousins in Palestine wrote that they lived on a community farm, near Haifa. And, while they were free from the Nazis, they were under almost constant bombardment from Arabs, who accused them of stealing Arab land. It seemed as though Jews were out of favor everywhere. But, at least they were still alive. Hanna's sister wrote that everyone lived in fear of being deported by the Germans. "That sounds familiar," remarked Moshe.

Jacob spent every available minute with Rachael. They were inseparable. Whenever possible, they made passionate love. It was the only truly beautiful part of their lives. And, while everyone understood their commitment to each other, it was not enough for them. Jacob and Rachael wanted to be married, even if it had to be in this hellish prison. They asked the Rabbi for permission, told their parents and arranged for the wedding. It was to be on October 4, 1941, Saturday night just after the Sabbath, and before the Succot holiday. While Jacob's parents were not thrilled with the surroundings, they deeply loved Rachael and welcomed her warmly into their family. "Besides," said Hanna, "in times like these, arranged marriages are old fashioned."

Ariel, on the other hand, was despondent. He smiled briefly and offered meek congratulations to them. Ariel was a broken man. After losing his beloved wife and now his daughter Anna, life was too much to bear. "The death of my wife was bad enough, but now, the death of my daughter is too much for me," he said to Jacob. Ariel now lived in a deranged environment, alienating himself from the other prisoners. He went to work at the infirmary for a while. But, seeing that there was little a physician could do for the diseases prevalent, he

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began to stay at home. By October 1941, he was governed only by chronic, unrelenting depression. He no longer worked or socialized with anyone, preferring the solitude of his barracks. Still, he loved Rachael very much and gave them his blessing.

No one anticipates a wedding inside a prison. But, that was the only choice for Jacob and Rachael. They were deeply committed to each other, but both had always wanted a fancy wedding. For weeks, they struggled with details. The invitations were printed on stolen paper, using the small press used for the Jewish newspaper. Rachael struggled to find a gown, in the end borrowing one from a friend. Fortunately, they were about the same size. Of course, it had to be taken in due to Rachael's weight loss. But, it would do nicely. Jacob, meanwhile, could not locate a tuxedo. The best that he could manage was to wear one of his father's suits. It also, was too large. Fortunately, there were a number of very talented tailors in Theresienstadt.

They met with the Rabbi to arrange the ceremony. He was their Rabbi at Salzburg. The old man was ill and trembled. But, he seemed anxious to discuss the ceremony with them. His voice creaked and was hoarse. He said, "The woman accepts a ring, or something of value from the man, accepting the terms of the marriage. This is called betrothal, or *kiddushin*. The marriage contract (*ketubah*) is read publicly. Witnesses are required for both the signing of the *ketubah* and the ceremonies." Then, the old man looked into Jacob's eyes. Although the old man was wrinkled, bent over with age and ill – his eyes sparkled with wisdom. "At the giving of the ring," he explained, "the groom makes a declaration. He speaks to his bride, 'You are consecrated to me, through this ring, according to the religion of Moses and Israel.'"

Jacob was lost in the old man's sparkling eyes. They were an unusually light shade of blue. He was captivated. "Traditionally," the Rabbi said, "there is no verbal response on the part of the bride. She accepts the ring on her finger, and closes her hand, signifying acceptance. Finally the couple are joined in matrimony under the *chuppah*, in the ceremony of *Nissuin*, symbolizing their setting up house together. Very often the *chuppah* is made of an outstretched *tallit*, the Jewish prayer shawl, but it can be any sort of canopy. The ceremony reaches its climax with both the bride and groom drinking wine." The old man must have said this a thousand times. Yet, his manner was such that it could have been his first time. The old man took care to enunciate every syllable of each word, as though they were precious in their own right.

The wedding night had finally arrived. In the center of the darkened commissary, Jacob and Rachael stood under a makeshift *chuppah*, surrounded by family and friends. This constituted the bulk of the Jewish population of Salzburg remaining alive in Europe. Dozens of others were present, a testimony to the popularity of the family. Looking up, Jacob saw that the *chuppah* was made of a wide variety of pieces of varying types of cloth – sewn together as carefully as possible. *I know that it is not the kind of wedding that we would have had at home. But it will do.* Behind the *chuppah*, posted upon the wall, was a picture of a blue and white flag, with a Star of David in the center. At that particular moment, Jacob thought it was very appropriate. More than anything,

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the Salzburg Jews regarded the home of their forefathers as sacred. Many of their former neighbors moved to Palestine when the Nazis gained control of Austria. It was as close to a homeland as Jews could imagine. Of course, any unauthorized meeting among Jewish prisoners was forbidden. Still, there were perhaps fifty people standing in the commissary to witness the happy occasion. Rachael and Jacob had also invited many of their new friends from the camp.

Moshe and Hanna walked slowly down the aisle and stood behind Jacob and Rachael, beaming with pride. Ariel, wearing his best black suit, walked next to Rachael down the aisle. He cried openly. Since Anna's death, he had been in complete despair. He stopped working, socializing and even eating. His life had become a dark, living hell. With tears flowing, Ariel handed Rachael's arm to Jacob, who accepted it as though it was a holy shrine. Jacob stared at Rachael. *No bride was ever as beautiful. I am the luckiest man alive.*

Rachael wore an elegant, long white gown covered in lace. Her face was just visible underneath the delicate white veil. Her large, brown eyes sparkled with excitement. There were dozens of candles surrounding the couple, casting a warm, flickering light upon the bare wooden barracks walls. Reflections from the candles danced in Rachael's eyes as Jacob gazed in wonder upon his beautiful bride. *This is the most amazing moment of my life!* Jacob melted into the dazzling radiance of his incredible soul mate.

Jacob and Rachael signed the makeshift marriage contract, authorized by the Rabbi as genuine. The frazzled Rabbi apologized for the poor quality. "Normally, I would purchase only the finest ketuba, but in a place such as this, what can one do?" The Rabbi hunched over the document, making sure that every word was correct.

The only light in the room came from a row of large candles arranged around the chuppah. Jacob looked at the Rabbi as he moved. A few wispy white hairs flew about randomly as he filled the wine glass and opened his ancient prayerbook. He was an old, sick man when the Nazis forced him to leave his synagogue in Salzburg. The poor man suffered from diabetes and heart disease. He'd had a stroke two years ago, leaving him with a bad limp and weakness on his left side. Now, he looked like death might overtake him at any moment. His skin was almost transparent, with veins poking out and running in all directions. And, he was covered with wrinkles and age spots. Yet, his eyes sparkled with wisdom and the joy of the task. "Yes, yes," he exclaimed, as he pushed himself out of a chair. "The contract is perfect," croaked the old man. He was ancient and unkempt. But, he was the only Rabbi that the families knew and the only Rabbi in their part of the camp.

All of the men wore white skullcaps. Jacob had them made in secret by a tailor he met at Theresienstadt. As the crowd sat down, the Rabbi began the formal marriage prayers. Hanna whimpered next to Moshe, tissue in hand. Her eyes were overflowing with tears. Moshe's eyes were moist too. However, his expression hid any underlying emotions. Moshe was always in control. He was the most gentle, even-tempered person that Jacob had known. But, Jacob understood that his actions were pleasing to his parents.

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The Rabbi rambled on with the appropriate prayers. Jacob tried to follow the service. However, when he looked into Rachael's eyes, the Rabbi's words began to fade away. In fact, the rest of the world faded into the background. She was without doubt the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen. Her faith in Judaism, her unwavering courage and her deep devotion for Jacob made him feel proud and fortunate. *Having Rachael carry my child would truly be the greatest miracle of all.* He knew that this child would be well taught in the Jewish way of life. He thought about how lucky he was to have a woman such as Rachael. It seemed as though everyone loved her – from family and friends to her students in Theresienstadt. Jacob looked up, briefly closed his eyes, and swayed as a result of his joy. He thanked God for this wonderful gift.

While the Rabbi chanted the ritual marriage prayers, Jacob was lost in deep thought. Suddenly, time seemed to slow down. *I am a prisoner of this enchanting love.* He gazed at Rachael, noticing the soft curves of her eyelids and the small wrinkles near the edges of her eyes. He became lost in the smooth skin of her neck and the way her hair curled above the lace of her white gown. The light of the candles danced in her shimmering dark hair, which had been braided and now cascaded over her shoulders. He noticed the small dimple in the center of her chin, a tiny brown birthmark on her soft cheek and the way her lips naturally curled up at the edges in a soft smile. Jacob was mesmerized by Rachael's perfect facial features and the tiny delicate wrinkles of her neck. There could be no other woman for him and he reveled in the moment. He loved Rachael more than life itself. It seemed a miracle that the person he fell in love with also loved him. He silently thanked God and vowed in return to use his life for the betterment of society.

The Rabbi was nearing the end of the ceremony. He asked Rachael and Jacob to commit themselves to each other. Shadows from the candlelight danced across the room. Jacob's heart was pounding. *I dedicate my life to you, my beloved. I am nothing without you.* Rachael softly spoke the words of the prayer, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." The Rabbi then asked Jacob to continue with the traditional act of stepping on an old light bulb, to remember the destruction of Jerusalem. The sound of it breaking, indicating the completion of the marriage ceremony, was met with a thunderous "Mazel Tov!" from everyone. Jacob and Rachael were, at last, husband and wife. A small orchestra began to play. The group surrounding Jacob and Rachael sang joyous Hebrew songs. For a long time, Jacob and Rachael danced and gazed longingly into each other's eyes. Being prisoners of the Nazis was terrible. However, for Jacob and Rachael, this was a perfect moment.

It was not the first wedding among prisoners at Theresienstadt. There would be many others, before all of the prisoners were sent east for "special treatment." However, the fact that they were prisoners and could be executed at a moment's notice seemed to be a world away – at least for that evening. And so, for several more months, the Salzburg Jews remained in Theresienstadt. The men and women worked in the nearby munitions plant, building bullets meant to kill the only people who could save them. And, the deportations continued. As 1941 passed into 1942, the angel of death spared them.

Chapter 19

Ariel's Deportation

As winter's wrath played out in Europe during the early months of 1942, most of the Salzburg Jews remained busy, working for the private companies that used the free labor of captive Jews. New prisoners always appeared. Many of them were Russian. They carried rumors that the German army was involved in a massive defeat in the frozen steppes of Russia. Like Napoleon, Hitler had underestimated the fierce Russian winter. Now, according to the rumors, hundreds of thousands of German soldiers lay frozen upon the tundra, defeated not so much by the Red Army as by force of nature. The rumors started a never-ending wave of rumors, giving and then snatching back hope.

More and more of the Salzburg Jews died. If disease did not kill them, it was starvation. By March, 1942, less than one hundred remained, of the initial two hundred and thirty seven. Still, they blended in with the many additional prisoners; Gypsies, homosexuals, enemy combatants and political prisoners. The vast majority of prisoners were Jews. But there were also many Christians in the camp. Among the prisoners, the differences that had in the past kept them apart now seemed mundane and irrelevant. Everyone understood that only their ability to work kept them from being deported to a much worse camp. Everyone began to fight for food, to stay focused, to find a way to stay alive for one more day. That was all that any of them had come to understand. No one thought about what they would do when the war was over. They thought only about tomorrow. How do I stay alive for one more day? Nothing else matters, except family.

Despite the fact that everyone in Theresienstadt wanted to be viewed as a strong, loyal worker, Dr. Ariel Goldberg spent his days lounging in his barracks, despondent with life. He had become morose and idle. Moshe pleaded with Ariel to work with him at the infirmary, to no avail. With each passing day, Ariel became increasingly depressed. He stopped attending meetings of the Council of Elders. Since he refused to practice medicine, the Germans assigned him to a work crew, like everyone else. They told him to work – or to be shot. Week by week, Ariel spent more and more time in his barracks, crying. His wife was dead. His daughter was dead. And now, his elder daughter was married. He had never felt so alone. He had lost so much weight that some people failed to recognize him. Everyone asked if he was ill. His skin took on a pallid complexion and his hygiene slipped badly. Rachael pleaded with him every day to go to work. She tried to take him to work, but was repelled by his belligerence. It seemed as though Ariel was being devoured by his despair. He valued only silence and abstinence from socialization.

One day, two guards approached Ariel in his silent barracks. "Get up, you stupid Jew! What's your name?" shouted the guard.

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Ariel slowly looked up from his chair, as though he was coming back from another world. He mumbled something in Yiddish that neither guard understood. "What did you say, you rotten stinking Jew?" asked the guard. Suddenly, the other guard hit Ariel on the back of his head with a gun butt. Ariel screamed in pain. "I asked for your name, Jew!" demanded the guard.

"I'm Ariel Goldberg," he managed to say. He felt blood running down the back of his neck. "Well, why aren't you working, with the rest of your vermin family?" The guard was now screaming at Ariel's face. Suddenly, the soldier attacked, smashing his helmet into Ariel's head. The SS insignia on the helmet pressed into Ariel's cheek, leaving blood. "Give me something, or I'll put your name in for the next transport," he shouted. Suddenly, Ariel looked into the guard's eyes and smiled. It was a genuine, deeply satisfied smile.

Ariel suddenly saw a way out of his constant torment. In a flash, it all made sense to him. He looked down for a moment, determining whether he truly wishes this opportunity. *Yes, please send me to a death camp. You would be doing me a favor.* Ariel looked up at the soldier who had hurt him and grinned. "What have I to give you?" asked Ariel. "I have no money, no property, nothing of value. I don't even have a watch to give you."

The guard drew his fist and swiftly brought it down as hard as he could across Ariel's face. His nose broke in two places. Bright red blood poured down across his lips, his mouth and his chin. It dripped onto his white shirt. Ariel moaned in pain. "You stupid Jew!" yelled the guard.

"Stupid kike!" the other guard exclaimed, behind him.

Ariel murmured softly, "Another country heard from." The response was another blow to the head, this time from the other guard, on Ariel's right ear. Ariel was overcome by a high-pitched squealing sound as his eardrum exploded.

"I'll make sure that the name 'Ariel Goldberg' is on the next transport list," shouted the first guard. They finally left Ariel's barracks.

As they left, Ariel heard the second guard say "Now I've got Jew blood on my uniform. Did I get any on my head? I hear that it can kill you."

They left Ariel with a severely broken nose, shattered eardrum and two severe scalp lacerations. He was beginning to lose blood rapidly. As he began to lose consciousness, he muttered to himself... "Please kill me." The sound of the guards boot steps echoed as they left the barracks. Ariel began to cry, his tears mixing with the blood on his face.

When Rachael came home from teaching, she saw her father's suitcase near the door. It was packed. Rachael looked at Ariel, saw tears in his eyes, and began to cry relentlessly. "What has happened?" she screamed. Ariel produced the notice for resettlement.

Rachael grabbed the paper from her father's hand and read it with a horrified expression. It said that "Dr. Ariel Goldberg has been selected for Resettlement." He was ordered to be at the train station on March 22, 1942, at 6:00 a.m. If he failed to arrive at the prescribed time, he would be "executed as a traitor to the Reich."

Rachael was appalled. "Papa, when did this arrive?" She looked down at the document again. "It is dated almost four weeks ago! Why did you hide this

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from me? Why Papa? Why?" Rachael exploded at him. She was shrieking. Ariel had not anticipated that the shock would have such a devastating effect upon Rachael. She now screamed at him, inches from his face. Spittle flew as she yelled. "Why won't you work? They will let you stay here if you work! My God, Papa, don't leave me!"

She cried in anguish for hours. Ariel put his arm around his daughter and ran his hand through her hair. He looked down at her and poured out his affection. "Oy, my little Rachaele, do you remember when I used to call you that?" Rachael nodded her head as tears ran down her cheeks. "You were my little Rachaele when you were just a baby. I don't know why I called you that. However, it stuck, didn't it?"

Again Rachael nodded her head, this time with a brief smile. Ariel wiped Rachael's tears away and said, "You were my little princess. I adored you from the moment that you were born. I remember holding you in my arms, as though it happened yesterday. I thanked God for such a wonderful gift."

Rachael trembled in her father's arms. She had never been so afraid. Her despair was overwhelming. Gazing up into her father's eyes, with tears running down her cheeks, she said, "Oh, Papa. I love you so much. Please do not leave me alone!"

Ariel suddenly pulled Rachael up to a sitting position. He peered deeply into her eyes, running the palm of his right hand across the side of her face. "I am not leaving you alone, my dear. I am leaving you with the best possible man to take care of you. I love Jacob, as though he was my own son. He is strong, bright and wise. And, like his father, he is warm and gentle. Jacob has a great destiny. Do not ask how I know this. But I feel it deep in my heart. You are a perfect couple. You make each other better.

While stroking her hair with his left hand, Ariel spoke in a very soft voice. "Rachael, it has been my privilege to be your father. You have taught me so much about life. I have tried my best to be a good father. I know that I could not make up for the attention that your mother would have given you. I am so sorry for that, my dear, sweet daughter. I love you more than life itself. I would do anything right now to save you. But you must understand that it is best for me to go now. My life is spent. I no longer wish to live. For me, there can be no future. You must allow me this dignity. You must let me go."

Rachael shuddered and trembled, unable to comprehend how deep her father's depression had become. Ariel grasped Rachael's cold, trembling hand in his large, soft hands. Looking into her eyes he said, "Rachael, you must promise me one thing before I leave. You must promise to find a way to survive. Please, my dear sweet princess. Please promise that you will live on. Promise that you and Jacob will have children and that you will teach them to be good Jews. Please my Rachaele."

Rachael looked into her father's wise old eyes with recognition. She had suddenly retreated into her childhood, when her father called her Rachaele. She adored her father and had many wonderful experiences with him. It broke her heart to see this frail old man who no longer resembled her father. But, she understood that he needed to tell her these things. So she remained silent.

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Finally it was almost over. Ariel kissed his only-remaining daughter and held her hand. "Oy, my Rachaele." Ariel exclaimed. "My time has come, my little sweetheart." Ariel struggled to find the right words. "I have had a good, long life. I had a wonderful marriage. You know how much I loved your mother." Rachael nodded. "I lived to help two beautiful children grow up. But, your mother is gone and little Anna is also gone. Now you are married and Jacob will take care of you. Don't you see, little princess? Don't you see that it is now my time to go? Please, let me go."

Rachael was furious and deeply hurt. Nothing that her father said could help assuage her dejection. The thought of Anna's death increased her torment. "It's time for me to go Rachael," he whispered.

"No!" screamed Rachael. "You don't have to go. You can work. If you won't work at the hospital, they will give you a job," she screamed. Tears were now flowing down her face. Her eyes were wide open, in panic. "If you won't work, then at least run away Papa!" Rachael was now trembling with fear. "I cannot lose you Papa!"

Suddenly, Rachael sat up, grasped her father's arms and looked deeply into his eyes. "Do you know what happens to people after they leave for resettlement Papa?" After a long silence, Ariel said softly, "Yes, my sweet one, I believe that I understand." But, I also know that our family will carry on, with you and Jacob. You must go on Rachael. The children of Israel must survive. Whatever it takes, whatever the risks, you must find a way to survive. You and Jacob must never allow the Nazis to destroy all of us. Oy, Rachael, I love you so much. But you must let me go. May it please God; we will see each other again. If not, I know that you will not forget me. I love you so much..." They fell asleep in each other's arms for the last time.

The next morning, Rachael awoke and found a letter from Ariel. He had left dressed in his finest suit, with a small piece of bread and his suitcase. The letter, in his perfect handwriting read, "My daughter, my life, my sweetness... I know that you will find a way out of this madness. Because your mother died when you were so young, and you had no older siblings, you have had to be strong. You have been like a mother for Anna. I cannot thank you enough for that. Even when you were a child, you were mature. I know that you will find a way to survive. You must, because we are God's chosen people. Whatever it takes, you must survive. Rachael, you are strong and smart. So is Jacob. I could not have been blessed with a better son-in-law. He loves you very much. Rachael, please promise me that you will live. Promise that you will take care of Jacob. Promise that one day you will have a baby and that child will carry on our heritage. We cannot allow these monsters to remove Judaism from the entire world. I love you so much, my Rachaele. Remember me, for I will live on only in your memory. Good-bye."

Rachael ran to the train station under a cold drizzle. She had covered herself with an old, torn blanket. Yet, the freezing rain soon soaked it. By the time she arrived, the Germans were forming lines with the relocating prisoners. The train, as usual, consisted of a locomotive and cattle cars. Some of the cars were open to the elements. Ariel, like the others, had been forced to stand in a

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long roll-call line for hours. Everyone was drenched and freezing. Steam rose from the mouths of hundreds of prisoners as they waited patiently in line. Children stood wrapped in the warm arms of their parents. Talking was not allowed. Observing from a window of the school building, Rachael lamented that it was the most despondent lineup of people that she had ever seen. She gazed through the window and wept as she had never cried before. Dark thoughts marched through her mind. *I will never see my beloved father again! I feel like an orphan already. What gives these Nazis the right to destroy my family? What gives them the right to destroy our race?* She wished that Jacob was with her. But, he was working at the munitions factory.

Finally, the line moved forward and Ariel was at the ramp, ready to board the train. Rachael watched as Ariel slowly walked up the ramp and then stopped at the top. He turned around to look one more time at the camp, which had been his prison for many months. He saw Rachael watching from the school window. Their eyes locked one final time. Ariel smiled at his daughter as a tear fell from his left eye. Then, he turned around and disappeared in the train.

Dr. Ariel Goldberg arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau two days later. He had been deprived of food and water. Four people in his car died on the way. He had to pull icicles from outside the cattle car and melt them for water. The train entered Auschwitz at night. Ariel looked out through the cracks of the train car and saw two large buildings separated by a swarm of train tracks and a road. On the other side of the road, Ariel saw a large brick building with a huge smokestack. A great deal of fire and dense smoke was coming out of the chimney. He could hear the thunder of the chimney from the train. Finally, the train's doors were opened. Many German soldiers stood near the train, each with a machine gun. They began to scream at the group in the train to come out. Amazingly, there was a group of prisoners yelling at them in Yiddish.

Ariel was confused. *Jews are helping to do the work of Nazis? How can they? My God, in all good conscience – how can they?* Ariel's group was forced out of the cattle cars and into a long line. It began to snow as they waited in line. Nobody was allowed to speak. Everyone in line was trembling with fear and from the cold. When examined by a doctor, Ariel lied about his occupation. He said that he was a "laborer." He understood, of course, that his feeble condition was inappropriate for a laborer. And, without special skills, he was worthless to the Germans. This would be his form of suicide. Because of his lie, Ariel was assigned to the "bad" line. It was not the line for life. He watched as the doctors examined the incoming prisoners. Some of them were told to undress. The doctors pushed and pulled and prodded at the naked prisoners.

Ariel observed that there were only two lines after the examination by doctors. One line, which was shorter, contained people who appeared relatively young and strong. The other line, which was much longer, contained the old, the infirm and young children. That line led to a low, brick building – a building that seemed to be attached to the building that housed the huge smokestack.

After a while, Ariel's line moved along into an underground building where everyone was told to take off their clothes for "bath and inhalation therapy. The prisoners who were helping the Nazis yelled at the group in Yiddish. They iden-

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tified themselves as “Kapos.” These prisoners-turned-traitors repeated the same sentences over and over. “Remember the number above the hook where you hang your clothes. You will need to re-claim them later. Tie your shoes together, so that you won’t lose them after your shower. Prepare for inhalation.” The prisoner-helpers repeated this on and on and on. The naked prisoners, including Ariel, had their hair shorn off before moving further into the low building. At one point, Ariel thought that he heard people walking upon the roof. When this was done, several prisoners forced them into a large room with plumbing and showerheads on the ceiling. The huge door then was slammed shut and bolted on the outside. The inside of the door was smooth and without handles. Moments later, soldiers on the roof dropped canisters into the room which began to emit a cloud of vapor. There was much instantaneous pushing, screaming and panic. Ariel understood what was happening and inhaled the smoky air deeply. It left a residue of something familiar upon the back of his palate. He thought that he noticed a faint odor of garlic.

In less than five minutes, Ariel was dead. Minutes later, another huge door was opened at the other end of the shower room. More prisoners entered the room and began to pick up and carry out the bodies. Children were carried by an arm or a foot. The bodies were placed into large containers and sent up an elevator. At the top of the elevator, more of these prisoners carried the bodies to openings in the crematorium, where they were fed into the flames by prisoners who tended the fires. Ariel’s body arrived at the precise location of Jacob’s nightmare. Ashes from the burned prisoners flew downwind from the smokestack, covering the nearby town with a fine white coating.

Chapter 20

Rachael's Terrible Ordeal

As winter melted into spring, in 1942, Commandant Strobel began to spend an inordinate amount of time in the Jewish School. Of course, everyone at the school knew why he was there. He would make a show about "inspecting" the school, but would soon gravitate to Rachael's side. He stared at her unabashedly. Each time, he seemed to move closer to her, although it was forbidden to "touch" a Jew (unless absolutely necessary). Still, Strobel appeared consumed with Rachael. The closer he moved to her, the more frightened she became. He was almost twice Rachael's age, balding and overweight. He also regularly smelled of alcohol. Rachael found Strobel disgusting.

On a cold and dreary day in late March, Rachael left the school building and stumbled through the mud towards her barracks. Nature, it seemed, was not willing to give up on winter, despite the lateness of the season. Warmer weather during the prior week had warmed the ground, but also brought rain with it. Now a new frontal system had turned the rain into snow. The tops of the barracks were soon snow-covered, with plumes of white smoke coming from each chimney. Icicles hung from the edges of the roofs. The sky seemed as though it had been filled with ominous snow clouds for month after month of this cruel winter. Although the new snow covered the buildings and trees, it melted as soon as it touched the muddy ground. Walking across the camp was now more like slugging through a vast mud-filled swamp. With each step, Rachael's foot fell deeply into mud. Only her ankle was visible above the mucky camp road. Each time her foot came out, it created a slurping sound as mud, air and water were displaced. During times like this, it could take almost half an hour to walk a hundred meters.

Suddenly, Rachael felt a tug on her arm. A young German guard instructed her to go immediately to the commandant's office. "Commandant Strobel wants to see you," the guard said. He winked at her when he said it. Suddenly, Rachael's heart began to pound. And, despite the cold temperature, she began to perspire. She felt dizzy, as well. The camp was spinning around her. For a long time, Rachael had feared being alone with the Commandant. She knew what Strobel wanted from her and it was something that only her dear Jacob could have. "Move," the guard ordered, as he pushed Rachael into the commandant's office. Strobel gave a stern look at the guard, told his junior officer that he was to "remain undisturbed" and then he locked the door from the inside.

"Welcome, Rachael," said the smiling Strobel as she entered. She nearly jumped as he brushed the snow from her shoulders. "Take off your coat and come in," said Strobel in a very warm and suggestive voice. Rachael stood mute in the commandant's office. She trembled with fear. *What am I to do? He wants to take me and I cannot allow it! Oh, my God, what am I to do?* Although it was warm in Strobel's office, Rachael shivered. She felt suddenly strange, as though

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a terrible life-changing event was about to happen and she was powerless to avoid it.

As Rachael stood trembling, she quickly surveyed the office. The room had old faded green paint on the walls. It was flaking off in places. The ceiling was white, but dingy because paint was old. There were two windows, on alternate sides of the office. They were standard casement windows, with locks on the inside. Strobel had a couch; four chairs, a desk and a meeting table. There were assorted tables, lamps and scenic pictures. Behind the desk, on the wall, was a picture of Hitler, dressed in an Army uniform. He was saluting, with his right arm and fist extended out in front of his body. He looked as though he was observing something meaningful far in the distance. Rachael shivered again while looking at the picture of Hitler. She knew that the man was destroying the Jews of Europe and she despised him. And, she despised this fat oaf who wanted to take her now, in his locked office. Fearful thoughts raced through her mind. *I am trapped!* At this moment, nothing was more important to Rachael than escape. Of course, it was impossible.

As she continued to survey the office, Rachael's eyes rested on an item of profound interest. On a small, round wooden table in the corner of the room was a brown radio. Rachael could hear music playing on it. A radio was like gold in the camp. Everyone wanted to know how the war was going. Prisoners who worked in the offices sometimes heard news in German on a radio. However, that news was pure propaganda and could not be believed. The prisoners longed to listen to the BBC, or any other station that emanated from a free country. Life would be so much happier if they only knew that the Allies were advancing to liberate them. Suddenly, Rachael had an idea.

"Come, sit with me here," invited Strobel, now sitting on the couch. She looked at him for a moment, frozen in fear. As she began to walk over to the couch, Rachael passed a mirror on the wall. She looked into the mirror and stopped short. Rachael had not been in front of a mirror for many months. The person in the mirror was a stranger to her. She was so shocked by the vision of herself that she began to faint. The woman in the mirror looked to be around thirty or forty years old. Rachael was barely twenty-two. The woman in the mirror was emaciated and her head had been recently shaved. Her dark hair was little more than stubble on top of her head. Her face was very thin and her eyes were encircled by dark rings. Dark, dingy teeth were revealed when she opened her mouth. In the mirror, the woman's arms and legs were like twigs. Her lips were chapped and the skin around her face was dry. Rachael was so completely engrossed in this "strange person" looking back at her from the mirror that she did not hear Strobel calling her.

"I said, come here!" This time Strobel said it in a loud and commanding voice. "Sit with me," he said motioning to the couch. As she did, Strobel took off his coat and began to unbutton his shirt. He could see that Rachael was shivering and moved to put his arms around her. Rachael shrunk back from Strobel, as though he was a hideous insect. "You must not be frightened of me," he said in as warm a tone as he could muster. "I want to take care of you. You know that I could make it easy for you here, don't you?"

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Rachael was frozen with fear. She sat on the end of the couch, as far from Strobel as possible, with her arms folded in front of her. Strobel inched ever closer to Rachael on the couch. She could now smell his foul breath. "Would you like a drink, my dear?" he said. "I have some wonderful cognac." Still, she remained mute. "Please, I only want to help you," beseeched Strobel. He continued to unbutton his shirt. It was becoming painfully obvious to Rachael that this foul man, reeking from liquor, meant to have sex with her. Rachael had never been with a man, other than Jacob. The thought of being with this hideous German officer made her nauseous. She began to shake violently and was lightheaded. As Strobel stood up and removed his shirt, Rachael began to retch. Had there been any food in her stomach, it would have been on the wooden floor of the commandant's office.

As Strobel began to remove his trousers he said, "Now I want you to take your clothes off." Rachael refused. Strobel paced back and forth in his office, with a stern expression. It was obvious that he would not be denied.

Suddenly, Strobel stopped pacing and smiled. "Rachael, I could hurt you, but I see that you are a strong woman. I know who you are, where you are from and who you love." Suddenly terrified, Rachael suddenly looked up at him. Strobel could see the fear on her face and smiled broadly. Now... he had her! "My dear Rachael, I know that you married a man named Jacob, inside the camp and without permission. Yes, sweet Rachael, I know much more than you think. I know that your "Jacob the Jew" and his parents are here. I can send all of them for "special treatment."

Rachael knew that "special treatment" meant a train to a camp from which no one ever returned. For the first time, Rachael was truly fearful. She was not afraid for herself. She could probably endure being raped by this disgusting fat man. But, she could never forgive herself for being responsible for the further deportation (and death) of her husband and his parents. She knew now that she had to give in. "Now, do as I say and take your clothes off," snorted Strobel.

Rachael stood before Strobel and slowly removed her clothing. She was overcome with shame. The Germans had taken so much from her. She stood naked and trembling, covering herself with her hands. Rachael had never been so afraid – even when she and Jacob had been chased by German soldiers in Salzburg. As she stood in the commandant's office, nude, shivering and terrified, she decided to try to go elsewhere in her mind. Rachael began to chant prayers inside her head. Strobel put his arms around her and she flinched. She despised his touch. As he moved his hands across her stiff body, Rachael tried to find comfort in the Hebrew songs of her childhood. The more he poked at her and pinched her, the deeper she traveled inside her psyche. She pretended that she was teaching school. She sung the same songs over and over again. It was the only way that she could take her mind away from Strobel's disgusting actions.

Strobel removed his underwear and ordered Rachael to sit on a chair. He stood before her, with layers of fat hanging over his belly, exposing himself to her. "Take me in your mouth," ordered Strobel. Rachael stared at him in abject trepidation. Her hands were shaking. "NOW!" Strobel shouted at her.

Rachael slowly pulled her hands up, but they were still shaking violently.

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Strobel grabbed her hands and pulled her face to him. He smelled terrible, as though he had not bathed for a long time. The stench of his crotch was overpowering. She pulled back to breathe, but Strobel pushed her head back into the hideous odor. She could feel him pulsating inside her mouth. A wave of nausea overcame Rachael and she retched. If she had a knife, she would have cut off the offensive organ, rejoicing in Strobel's pain. But she had no choice. Strobel pushed himself rhythmically into her mouth. His large folds of fat wobbled and jiggled in front of her eyes. It was all that she could see. Soon, he began to groan. Rachael hoped that her agony would end as soon as he had his orgasm. She shut her eyes tightly and began to use her tongue. She assumed that if Jacob enjoyed it, so would this terrible excuse for a man. "Ah, yes... that is it. Keep doing that," Strobel ordered her. He was now breathing heavily.

Strobel felt the urgency of approaching climax and he pulled himself out of Rachael's mouth, to her great relief. Unfortunately, he was not finished with her. "Lay down on the couch," Strobel demanded. She did not move. "*NOW!*" Strobel screamed at her, this time shaking his fist in her face. Suddenly, he slapped her face very hard. It stung horribly. Rachael stood up and backed her way to the couch. For some reason, she could not turn her back on this evil man. She covered her breasts with her hands and lay on the couch, as ordered, her entire body shaking. Strobel advanced, his erect member swaying back and forth as he walked. As he neared the couch he said, "put it in your mouth again."

Rachael suddenly stood up and said, "No, I won't do any more of this. I am *married* and I have a *husband*. This is evil. It's against God and I will not do this!" Strobel again slapped her face, this time with all of his might. Rachael reeled backwards and fell upon the couch. Blood streamed out from her nose, dripping bright red upon her pale white neck and running down her breasts.

Strobel smiled and softly said, "Shall I have your husband and his family sent away for special treatment right now?" Again, that thought sent a shockwave of fear through her mind. With abject resignation, Rachael realized that she had no choice but to comply. With her decision obvious, Strobel moved his odorous crotch back into Rachael's face and she complied.

Strobel backed Rachael down onto the couch roughly. Her elbow struck the wooden edge of the couch and she screamed as pain shot from her elbow up and down her arm. Strobel said nothing. He was busy fondling her. His movements were rough and hard. It had now become physically painful. She began to sing again in her mind. It was the only way to shut Strobel out. The more that Rachael concentrated on her Hebrew songs, the more Strobel's world of pain began to dissipate.

Suddenly, Strobel roughly spread her legs apart. Rachael was brought back into Strobel's world quickly and she hated it. He pushed inside of her. The pain was shocking. He made no attempt to be gentle. His movements were forceful and painful. He pushed himself deeply into her and soon began to rock back and forth. His foul breath upon her face made Rachael ever more nauseous. The harder he pushed, the more Rachael concentrated on her music. *I am not here! This foul man is not here! I am in school, teaching children.* She sang songs and prayers in her mind over and over. Yet, he continued to push, harder and faster.

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Finally, Strobel was panting and out of breath. He began to groan and then to grunt. As he continued pushing, he began to sound like a pig. Rachael tried to go somewhere deep inside herself, to sing and pray. She struggled to push reality away, yet the pushing and grunting pushed reality into her imagination. When that failed to work, she replaced Strobel with Jacob in her mind. *This is Jacob, not the stinking commandant! Jacob is with me now!* Suddenly, it was easier to take. Finally, Strobel thrust as deep as he could and let out a hissing sound that seemed to Rachael like air coming out of a tire. Rachael felt him release inside her. *Could it be over? Is this nightmare finally gone?*

It was over. Rachael lay on the couch, her legs apart and her arms flat on her sides. Strobel took a moment to catch his breath. Rachael wanted nothing more than to have this monster get out of her. She trembled as she waited for Strobel to dismount. But, he weighed over three hundred pounds and she could not push him away. He remained on top of her. Tears streamed down Rachael's face, mixing with the blood from her nose. The mental anguish was excruciating.

Finally, Strobel pushed himself up. Rachael felt shameful, helpless, disgusting and filthy. Her mind continued to wander. *I must wash myself. I must wash myself. I must wash myself!* Rachael was now screaming inside her mind. She would never forget that feeling for the rest of her life. It seemed to chill her very soul.

Rachael remained on the couch, her hands still shaking with fear. No other man had touched her until this day. So many strong emotions collided in her mind. *I am so disgusting. Jacob will not love me when he discovers this. My life is over.* She could only think of Jacob. *There will be no other man for me. I promised Jacob that I would be true to him forever. Now, I have broken that promise.* Beyond the shame and abhorrence, Rachael now discovered a new ache, and it grew by the second. She felt guilty. *How could I do this to Jacob?* From deep inside, an answer replied, *I did it to save his life and his parents' lives.*

More than anything, Rachael needed a bath. She needed to scrub herself clean from the filthy pig that had just raped her. As she edged her way to the door, Strobel's fist again slammed into her face. Her nose exploded in pain. "Did I say that you could leave?" Strobel was livid. He suddenly began to punch her as hard as he could, his fists slamming into her abdomen and ribs. She turned away to avoid the punishment. Instead of stopping, Strobel began to kick her. She fell to the floor as blood poured from her face. He kicked again and his right boot broke two ribs on her right side. She screamed in agony. Strobel howled at her. "Shut up, stupid Jew-bitch!"

This punishment lasted several more minutes, until Rachael curled into a fetal position on the floor. Finally, Strobel glanced at the closed and locked office door and backed up a few steps.

Rachael looked up into Strobel's dark, fiery eyes. "Why are you doing this to me?" No sooner did she ask this question did she realize that it was a mistake. Strobel began pounding his fists into her again and again. Finally, when his strength was gone, he spoke. "I hit you because you are not a person. You and all of your Jewish relatives are parasites. I hit you because it is my pleasure to do with you anything that I please. Besides, it won't matter soon. Yes, soon there

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will be no more Jews in Europe. So what does it matter if I hit you now. You will soon be dead.” Rachael spat blood out at this disgusting man with reprehension. It fell on the floor near her feet. She understood that he was telling the truth. For the first time, she truly believed that she and Jacob would die unless they could find a way to escape.

Slowly, Strobel put his clothes on. “What are you waiting for, Jew-bitch? Get the hell out of my office!” Rachael grabbed her clothes and began to put them on as quickly as possible. Her ribs screamed in pain with every move. Bruises were darkening all over her thin, naked body. She had never been in so much pain, physically, emotionally and mentally. Dark feelings were spinning around in her mind. She hated Strobel with all of her might. Yet, she was overwhelmed by shame. As Rachael left the room, she again glanced at the precious radio. Suddenly, that radio became very, very important. She promised herself that if she had another opportunity, she would steal it.

Strobel called Rachael to his office two more times as winter melted into spring. Both times ended with the same result. Rachael was raped and beaten. Each time, Rachael replaced Strobel with Jacob in her imagination. The pain was easier to take that way. Each time, she left with a deep feeling of degradation and despair.

However, during her third and final visit to Strobel’s office, he fell asleep after he had raped her. Rachael quietly got up from the sofa and stood silently in the center of the office. She stared down at the man she wanted to kill. It would be so easy now. She could take his pistol, which lay upon the nearby chair. Or, she could use the long knife that rested next to the fireplace. Still, there was something more important to Rachael. She stared at the radio for a very long time. She looked back at Strobel who was still asleep.

Silently, she walked over to the table, looking back every few seconds to see if Strobel had awakened. Finally she reached the table. She stared at the radio for a few seconds, admiring it. Again, she looked back at Strobel who was still asleep. Finally, she bent over and unplugged the radio. She then wrapped the appliance in her overcoat; put her clothes back on and walked back to her barracks. Rachael feared that stealing the radio would get her killed. Yet, what kind of life was this? Amazingly, no guard asked her why she was walking in cold air with her coat bundled in front of her instead of around her shoulders. Rachael arrived at her barracks just before she fainted.

The next day, Rachael gave the radio to Adam Levy. However, she made Adam promise never to tell anyone who gave it to him or where it came from. More than death, Rachael feared that Jacob would discover that the camp commandant had raped her. She feared that Jacob would no longer love her if he discovered that another man had sexual relations with her. This fear was, to Rachael, much worse than her fear of death. The thought soon preoccupied her mind continuously.

The next day, Strobel discovered the radio missing. He was livid. He went into a tirade, screaming at everyone in sight. He had the entire camp turned upside down. The contents of each barracks were emptied. Then all of the other buildings were searched. But, Levy had hidden the radio very well. Within a few

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days, word of the missing radio had spread across the camp. It seemed that everyone in Theresienstadt was talking about it. When Jacob spoke of it to Rachael, she fought tears back. He told her that he wanted to meet someone so brave. Rachael desperately wanted to tell him that it was her. She was that brave person who stole the Commandant's radio. Yet, how could she then explain why she was in his office. Her greatest fear was that Jacob would discover that the commandant had raped her. When that happened, Rachael was convinced that her marriage would end.

Days and weeks passed by, yet the radio was not found. Jacob and Rachael continued to see each other, each time Rachael was careful to make sure that Jacob did not see her deep bruises. Apparently, he had no idea that Rachael had been raped by the commandant. And, if Strobel thought that Rachael had stolen the radio, he gave no indication of it to anyone. Perhaps he was as ashamed of raping a Jewess as Rachael was of being raped by him.

Meanwhile, news of a radio in the hands of prisoners spread among the Jewish leaders within the camp. By the end of April, when the searching had finally ceased, Levy brought the radio out and gave it to the Jewish leaders, including Moshe. Of course, everyone knew that it belonged to the commandant. It was clearly the radio everyone had been searching for.

The leaders were elated. Their first decision was to destroy as much of the radio's chassis and exterior as possible, making it almost impossible to identify, if discovered. Then, they decided to hide it in a small space underneath the stove of Barracks XXVII, where Adam was assigned. It seemed like a place unlikely to be searched, and it was also a place that many could access from time to time without arousing suspicion. Breaking brooms apart, they created two long wooden handles, in order to lift the stove when it was hot.

To the prisoners of Theresienstadt, the radio was precious. For the first time, factual news of the war reached them. They soon discovered that the Americans had joined forces with the British, Australians and Canadians in North Africa. They knew now that rumors of the Allied invasion at Normandy were correct. The Allies had engaged Germany on three fronts! They also learned that the war was going badly for the Germans in Russia. This confirmed the rumors carried in by Russian prisoners that had enveloped the prisoner population. The Germans had apparently extended their lines beyond their ability to supply. The frozen Russian winter had killed the German advance. As when Europe fought Napoleon, nature became an ally. According to new reports, the Yanks and Brits would soon continue their attack in Africa, driving the Nazis back into central Europe.

The Theresienstadt prisoners also were thrilled to learn, via the radio, about an underground movement throughout Europe to fight the Nazi occupation. Partisans everywhere were hitting German trucks and trains and then slinking back into the forest or into the shadowy depths of a city. The partisans were people who hated the Nazis and their brutal regime and cared enough to do something about it. According to the BBC, thousands of civilians had taken up fighting the Germans in any and every possible way. They used dynamite to blow up train tracks, slowing the German war machine. They attacked German positions and

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retreated, before the Germans could hit them back. This new type of warfare was unexpected, yet lit a spark of bravery within the civilian populations of occupied countries. Some of these people were escaped prisoners.

Rachael suddenly noticed a new sparkle in Jacob's eyes. During the coming months, Jacob spoke ceaselessly of joining the partisans. More than anything, this news brought hope to the Jews of Theresienstadt.

The news obtained through the stolen radio eventually led to an underground ghetto newspaper, distributed secretly to Jews within the camp. Of course, it didn't take long for the Germans to discover it. But, they never discovered who stole the radio or where it was being hidden. Perhaps the commandant's heart was filled with desire for Rachael. Perhaps he was too embarrassed to admit that it was stolen by a Jewess whom he had raped.

Chapter 21

The Commandant's Rage

On May 22, 1942, prisoners coming from the Commandant's Office overheard a general commotion. After much screaming, Strobel emerged from his office. He stomped in a rage directly to the barracks closest to his own building. Strobel entered the barracks, which contained only a few people. These were prisoners who were too weak or ill to work. He strode directly to a middle-aged woman who was sitting near the stove.

"I order you to tell me who stole my radio," Strobel demanded to the woman. This poor woman seemed to have had no idea that a radio was stolen. She was also considerably ill and was coughing constantly. The woman simply stared at Strobel, giving him no reply. Suddenly, Strobel grabbed the woman and dragged her outside. He carried her in front of the school, which was near the center of the camp's entrance.

Holding the woman out at arms length, Strobel again demanded to know where his radio was. He grasped her neck with both hands and held her off the ground. Now terrified, the choking woman replied to Strobel. "I apologize, Herr Commandant, but I do not know of such a radio." Strobel was fuming. His red-rimmed eyes were bulging in their sockets. He was clearly on the brink of irrational behavior.

From the school building, Rachael and Hanna heard shouting outside. The teachers and students moved to the window. They saw Strobel holding a woman from Barracks VII. Strobel was shouting something about his stolen radio. Rachael and Hanna realized that this poor woman had no idea what Strobel was talking about. Rachael suddenly felt nauseous. She felt terribly sorry for this poor woman who was being brutalized for her actions. Strobel began to hit and slap the woman until her face was covered in blood. Rachael sobbed. *This is my fault. I must admit my guilt, to save this innocent woman!* Just as Rachael was about to open the door, Strobel suddenly stopped screaming at the woman and let her fall to the ground. The woman pulled herself up to her knees. Rachael saw that she was about forty to fifty years old. The woman wore a scarf to cover her head, which had been recently shaved. Frail and thin, she seemed lost inside her torn and tattered dress. The woman was completely confused about why she was being beaten. She was terrified.

Suddenly, Strobel pulled out his handgun. "Tell me now or I will kill you," he demanded. The poor woman was now immersed in a deep and uncontrollable coughing fit. She could barely breathe, much less speak. Strobel's face was contorted with fury and dejection. Rachael opened the door, prepared to turn herself in. *I will admit my guilt and save this poor woman.*

Rachael started to walk outside when someone grasped her arm and pulled her back. It was Hanna. Hanna's eyes were open wide with fear. She said

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nothing, but pulled Rachael back inside the school. Strobel stretched his arm out as far as possible, aimed at the woman's head and shot her. The bullet pierced the woman's already blood-covered face and exited from the back of her skull, carrying fragments of blood, brains and skull with it. The poor woman's head fell sharply backwards and she toppled over into a heap, coming to rest on her side. For Rachael, the ensuing silence was deafening.

Rachael couldn't stand the thought that a poor innocent woman was killed for something that she did. She burst into tears and ran out of the school. She had never felt guilt like this. The guilt seemed to burn into her soul. She cried for hours in her barracks. Something else bothered Rachael greatly. Strobel had always been evil, greedy and demanding. However, his behavior seemed greatly different now. She could see it in his eyes. She was certain that he was losing his mind.

The Jewish leaders gathered around the radio whenever it was safe to do so. Among them were Moshe, Jacob, Adam Levy, Chaim Weitzman and the young couple she had met during the Red Cross visit – David and Emily. Rachael watched as she saw the young Salzburg Jews, including Moshe and Jacob, smile – for the first time in many months. She suddenly realized that stealing Strobel's radio was the best thing that she had done for a long time, perhaps the best thing that she had done in her life. It gave her people hope. It gave them renewed energy and the will to fight on. Rachael smiled as she realized that she had made a significant effort to give her people hope. And while Rachael never forgot the face of the sick woman who was killed by Strobel because of the stolen radio, she remained proud of what she had done.

Strobel continued to enter a variety of barracks impulsively, searching for the radio. He ranted and raved and threatened to kill anyone involved in the theft. Only two days after executing the poor sick woman from Barracks VII, Strobel entered Barracks XXIII. He again selected a prisoner, apparently at random, and executed her for "stealing government property." Clearly, Strobel was a man who now lived at the edge of sanity. Somehow, the stolen radio had pushed him over the edge. He had become a frightening, unstable monster.

On May 28th, Strobel had his guards line up all of the prisoners from Barracks XVIII, as they did twice each day for roll call. However, this time his intention was not to verify prisoner count. Strobel marched back and forth, looking wild-eyed at each prisoner. Seemingly at random, he selected six prisoners. They were women who might have heard about a radio, but had no knowledge of its whereabouts.

Strobel gazed at the women for a moment, and then strode to the last one in line. "Where is my radio?" The poor woman gazed at him in fear. He pulled his handgun out from its holster and without the slightest hesitation, shot the woman in the head. Everyone screamed. The woman's head reared back as the bullet raced through her skull. She dropped straight to the ground, where her body twitched and jerked for a moment before becoming still. Blood shot out of her head in streaks a moment longer. The women in front of Barracks XVIII were paralyzed with fear. Someone's mother, sister, aunt or daughter had just been killed for no rational reason.

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Strobel raved and stomped the ground near the other five women, still standing at attention in abject fear. None of them knew where the radio was, or even if there was a radio. "Tell me where my radio can be found!" screamed Strobel. He suddenly stopped before a young woman who was standing at attention. She was not yet twenty years old. Thin and frail in appearance, she now trembled before the raging commandant. She looked in every direction for assistance. But, none was to be found. Her small hands shook violently in front of her as she held them together. Suddenly, Strobel raised his pistol and shot her. The young woman fell to the ground, lifeless. Now, another life – another future – vanished forever. The young woman might have been engaged. No longer could she contribute to society, to have children and teach them to be good citizens. What might she have accomplished? What potential improvement for humanity might have come from her children or grandchildren? Perhaps her entire family lineage was lost because of that bullet.

In his ongoing tirade, Strobel seemed oblivious to the blood on his hat, his uniform and his face. Systematically, the enraged commandant put a bullet through all of their heads. Finally, with all six executed women on the ground around him, Strobel looked out at the edge of camp, dropped to his knees and fell into a stupor. Covered with the blood of those he had just executed, and still on his knees, Strobel gazed into the distance for a very long time. The remaining fifty-seven women from Barracks XVIII prayed for their lives.

Finally, Strobel seemed to return from his mental vacation. He looked down at the dead women and at his blood-streaked uniform. He was still holding his pistol, now depleted of ammunition. The open chamber still produced a thin line of smoke that listlessly disappeared into the mist. He seemed dazed and confused, before finally walking back to his office. The surviving women of Barracks XVIII remained in line. They would live to see another day.

The next day, Strobel had his guards bring Rachael into his office. Anticipating another rape, Rachael began to undress. "No, stop undressing," Strobel commanded. "I don't want you for that today. In fact, my wife is coming here soon. In fact, I don't want any Jew-bitch in that way again." Strobel sounded different to Rachael. In the past, he had seemed almost tender with her. Now, he seemed much more pensive and disturbed.

Strobel spoke to her in a whisper. "You know, the radio from this room disappeared shortly after you were here with me. I believe that I fell asleep before you left. Is that not correct, my dear?" Rachael's heart pounded in her chest. Fear raced through her thoughts. *I have been discovered!* Still, he did not seem certain about it. Perhaps he was simply fishing for information. "So, tell me my pretty little Jewess, where is the radio?" Strobel said this in a soft, almost conversational manner.

Rachael was frozen with fear. Yet, she felt certain that Strobel was guessing. "I do not know where your radio is, Herr Commandant," replied Rachael breathlessly. She looked into his eyes, trying to gauge his thoughts. "If I hear about it, I will tell you." Strobel's steely eyes pierced Rachael's mind. "No Rachael. I believe that you do know about the radio." He was not about to allow this conversation to end. "I also know that you have a Jewish boyfriend here in

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the camp. Or, is he your husband? I even know his name – Jacob.” Suddenly, Rachael was terrified. For all of his raving, he had not forgotten about Jacob. Her heart was in her throat. She could withstand torture, rape, losing everything that she owned as well as her integrity. But the thought of losing Jacob was overwhelming. Still, she sensed that something was missing from Strobel’s threat. Something about it seemed empty, weak, and inconsistent. *He is still fishing.*

Strobel looked out of the window, across the camp. He suddenly seemed to detach himself from the world. Rachael had heard of his “sudden stupor” from a woman who had been in Barracks XVIII that horrible evening when he had executed six innocent women. He was in that same stupor now. Several minutes passed as Strobel gazed out the window.

Rachael lacked the courage to say anything. She had an irresistible urge to wave her hands in front of his eyes, but resisted it. Instead, Rachael looked back and forth at the clock. After almost fifteen minutes, Strobel suddenly rubbed his eyes and looked back at Rachael. He seemed confused, as though he had lost track of their conversation. He blinked several times before he spoke. “I do know the names of people that you care about. I also have a list of people from the camp named Jacob. Unfortunately, there are six hundred men here named Jacob. Shall I simply execute them all? Rachael turned to look at Strobel. A wicked smile covered his face. He seemed completely serious. Considering the many summary executions by Strobel during the past month, Rachael guessed that he would do it. “I shall give you two days to tell me,” he said. “Now, get out of here.” Rachael walked out of Strobel’s office with the weight of the world on her shoulders. Yet, there was something else weighing upon Rachael’s mind. It was equally terrible to comprehend.

Chapter 22

Rachael's Dilemma

Rachael told no one about being raped and the commandant's cruelty. She now lived in abject misery. She wanted to cry constantly, but forced herself to appear in public as she should. But, the fear that it would happen again was always present. Whenever a teacher or aid saw Strobel coming towards the school, Rachael would dash out to the latrine or the hospital. She tried her best to become invisible to him.

Rachael still left her barracks every night to see Jacob. Of course, he could tell that something was wrong. As they held each other and spoke, Jacob was compelled to discuss it. "What is going on Rachael?" asked Jacob one night.

"Nothing is wrong my dear," replied Rachael. Still, Jacob was worried.

On a relatively warm day in late May, Rachael left the school and went to the infirmary. Moshe was with a patient. As Rachael approached, she was surprised to see that Moshe had been examining Hanna. Moshe was now washing his hands over a bowl. He greeted his daughter-in-law with a warm smile and then a tight hug. He kissed her cheek gently. She knew that Moshe loved her as if she was his own daughter. But, whenever he kissed her that way, she was reminded of her father and it broke her heart. "How are you my dear?" asked Moshe.

Rachael turned to Hanna, asking if she was ill. Hanna offered a faint smile and said nothing. In fact, Hanna looked terrible. Rachael was disturbed, yet she could sense that Hanna did not wish to discuss her health. Besides, Rachael needed desperately to speak with Moshe alone.

Rachael seemed very uncomfortable and after a moment asked if they could talk privately. Moshe had a small office in the infirmary and they went there to talk. Hanna disappeared out of the infirmary. Rachael glanced nervously around Moshe's office. Finally, Moshe closed the door and sat next to her.

"Papa Moshe," Rachael struggled to get the words out. "I need to ask a favor of you. Could you please examine me for pregnancy?" Moshe appeared startled and his expression turned grave. While they said nothing about it, Moshe understood that it was forbidden for Jewish women to have babies.

"What makes you think that you are pregnant?" asked Moshe.

Rachael replied, "I have not menstruated for the past two months. I was always very regular. I never missed a month," she stated with a faltering voice. And, I was, well..." Suddenly Rachael burst into tears. She looked down at the floor. *I must tell someone!* With tears rushing down her face, she looked up into Moshe's eyes. *Yes, Papa Moshe will understand. He is the only person that I can confide in!* Rachael spoke in a trembling voice. "I was with the commandant and he... he..." Rachael began to sob. "I cannot tell you. I cannot tell anyone. It's so horrible."

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Moshe gently took Rachael in his arms and comforted her. He stroked her hair while her body was wracked by shudders and trembling. He allowed her to cry unrelentingly for a long time. Finally, when she had stopped, he said softly, "Tell me about it Rachael. I promise to tell no one about this."

Rachael told Moshe how the vicious commandant had raped and beat her, and that she had not menstruated since then. She also told Moshe that she had been nauseous the past several weeks, particularly in the morning. Moshe agreed to examine her. He also obtained a urine specimen. Finally, before she left, she told Moshe that she also made love with Jacob on several occasions in March.

The look in her eyes pleaded that she not be pregnant. Moshe felt her sorrow and anxiety. But there was little that he could do. "Come back in two days and I will have the lab report," said Moshe in almost a whisper. He then wrapped his arms around Rachael and held her tight. "I love you just as much as I love my son, Jacob. You know that, my darling? Yes?"

Rachael held on to Moshe tightly for several more minutes as she trembled. "I love you, as I love my own father, Papa Moshe. But, how could this happen to me?" cried Rachael. "Two years ago, I was a student. My greatest concern was where to go to college. I had a father and a sister, a beautiful home and wonderful friends. Now, because of the Nazis, my father and my sister are dead. I've been raped by a Nazi commandant and I'm forced to live with this for the rest of my life!" She was on the verge of hysteria. "But, I never imagined this. I never imagined becoming pregnant and not knowing which the father is! Papa Moshe, what should I do? What should I do?" Rachael wept in Moshe's arms for a long time.

Later, Rachael walked slowly back to the school in a fog. Starlings flew whimsically to and fro, like schools of fish that change directions in a split second. The aroma of French Lilac bushes, in full bloom near the quarters for the German families, filled her with memories. She had smelled lilacs that beautiful spring day when she and Jacob experimented with lovemaking. Rachael became lost in memories of that wonderful spring afternoon in her bedroom. She saw the pale, delicate curtains flapping in the open window. The world was so beautiful that spring afternoon. *A world of beauty still exists outside the gates of this hell.*

Behind the bushes, German children screamed and hollered at play. The splendor of that delightful spring afternoon was lost upon Rachael, who fell back into a deep anguish. *If I am really pregnant, who is the father? Is it my Jacob? Or, is it the monster, Strobel? Oh, dear God, what should I do? If Strobel knew that I took the radio, what would he do? Above all, Jacob must never discover that I was raped! Moshe promised not to tell and I believe him. But, rumors abound within the camp. Just being tested for it could start people talking.* Rachael cried constantly all the way back to the school. She had never felt so despondent.

Chapter 23

A Plan For Escape

Jacob sat in the laundry room with several other Jewish prisoners. It was Sunday, and the laundry was closed. The men were there because it would be a quiet place. It would be a place where they could speak without being overheard by the Germans. The group included Jacob, Hershel, Adam Levy, David Berg, Shlomo Rosenberg, Mordechai Feldman and Felix Ginzburg. They were all that remained of the young Jewish men from Salzburg. They spoke quietly now in a corner of the deserted laundry room.

“What do you mean? We should take on a role with the partisans?” asked Adam to Jacob.

Before Jacob could speak, Hershel replied, “Listen, if we stay here, eventually we will all die. The Germans allow us to live because we are valuable to them as forced labor. You can easily see which Jews go directly for ‘Special Orders’ or are deported to the east. One day, they will no longer find us useful and then all of us will go for ‘Special Orders.’”

“How on earth do you plan to escape?” asked Shlomo. Shlomo seemed the most timid of the group. He was small, with dark hair, which fell in long ringlets around his ears, a sign of his status as a Hassidic Jew. Shlomo’s father was the Rabbi in Salzburg’s only synagogue. “We have no weapons. Besides, if we fail, they will kill us for sure.”

David Berg had been patiently listening to members of the group and watching their body language. He now spoke. “Shlomo is right. It would probably not be wise to try an escape without weapons. So, how can we get some guns and grenades?”

Mordechai abruptly entered the conversation. “What about our families? What will happen to them after we leave? Who will take care of them? Even if we are successful and the partisans accept us, how can we protect our families? What if the Germans kill our families in retaliation? You must admit, that would be a strong deterrent to future escape attempts.”

Felix spoke up, in his squeaky-hoarse voice. “Perhaps we should remain where we are. After all, we are still alive. There is hope that the war will end soon. Besides, we are much too valuable to the Germans as forced labor. Where else can they obtain free labor? And, they need us to keep their war machine going.” He blinked several times behind the large, thick glasses that he always wore. Felix was a weakling. His arms and legs were like toothpicks. He was never involved in athletics. While some of the group respected his intellect, he was of no use in a fight.

There was a brief, uncomfortable silence, followed by Jacob’s strong voice. “None of you need go if you prefer to remain here with your family members. However, I agree with Hershel. The Germans use us now for labor, but they

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clearly despise us. We have reliable information that there are other, worse camps across Germany and Poland. Many of them are not forced labor camps. They are death camps. Jews go in and ashes come out." Jacob noticed Felix tremble as he spoke.

Jacob could not stop thinking about his horrific dream. Still, he continued, "My friends, I believe that the Germans mean to eventually exterminate every Jew from Europe. We live today, but our time is marked. I also agree with Shlomo. It might be too difficult for some of us to leave our loved ones. We should not force anyone to join in our plans. As for me, I will ask my wife, Rachael, to join us. I will also ask my parents, although my mother is ill and my father is responsible for the infirmary. I do not believe that he would leave his patients. However, I would rather die trying to escape than live each day in terror and in forced labor, only to be sent to a gas chamber in six months or a year. Hershel and I have made contact with the partisans, who live in the nearby mountains. They will allow us to join them in fighting against the Nazis."

The room was completely silent for a moment. Water dripped from a faucet nearby. Its sound was almost deafening in the silence. Children ran and screamed in play outside. Finally, Hershel spoke. "What is our plan, gentlemen?"

On June 2, 1942, Rachael visited the infirmary after her work was done at the school. All the way, Rachael felt a tight knot in her stomach. She was horrified about the test results. As she entered the infirmary, her eyes met with those of Moshe. As always, Moshe gave her a big smile. He loved his daughter-in-law very much. But, there was something hesitant about his smile this time that made Rachael nervous. "Rachael, please wait in my office," he said softly. In her mind, Rachael already knew the test results. *Oh, my God. I'm pregnant!*

Rachael waited patiently in the office. She stared at the various diplomas, medical books and the many pictures of Hanna and Jacob. Rachael loved to look at pictures of Jacob when he was little. She often thought that her child would have a similar appearance. This thought, combined with the horror of her rape, suddenly made her cry. *What if I have a baby and it looks like Strobel? Oh, dear God in heaven! What will I do then?*

Finally, Moshe entered the office, kissed Rachael on the forehead and sat down. "Oy am I tired!" he said as he collapsed into an old weathered chair. "There is so much sickness here. I could never have imagined typhus so out of control in a community. If we do not get medicine soon, I believe that two out of every five prisoners will die from typhus within a year. That is, of course, if they are not killed by the Nazis first." This was followed by a long silence, as Moshe looked out the window at the rows of barracks outside. Sparrows chattered away in the bushes outside his window.

Rachael finally could wait no longer. "Am I pregnant?"

Again, there was a long and uncomfortable silence. Finally Moshe leaned forward across his cluttered desk. "Yes, my dear, you are."

Tears brimmed up in Rachael's eyes. She struggled to maintain control of herself. Moshe got up and walked around the desk to comfort his daughter-in-law. Suddenly, Rachael lost control, crying violently. Moshe held her tightly.

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Later, when she was more composed, Rachael forced Moshe to promise not to say a word of this to Jacob. “Oh Papa, what should I do? What should I do?” Moshe held Rachael in his arms for a long time as she cried again, uncontrollably. He could not bear to feel her agony. She loved him almost as much as her own father. In return, Moshe loved Rachael as a father would a daughter. She wept on his shoulder for a very long time.

On the way back to her barracks, Rachael saw a new sign posted upon every building. It was stamped by the SS, as an official document of the German government. In thick, black ink, upon stark white cardboard, the sign read:

2 June, 1942 – Security Police Order

In accordance with the Order of the Security Police, births are permitted in the Jewish ghetto only up to August 15, 1942. After this date it is forbidden to give birth to Jewish children either in the infirmary or in the barracks. It is, however, permitted to interrupt pregnancies by means of abortion. Pregnant women who do not comply with this order will be summarily executed, together with their families. This is in compliance with the Race and Resettlement Act of the German Republic.

Rachael walked slowly back to her barracks from the infirmary. Every fiber of her being shouted “escape.” *Each day that I remain under German control is a day closer to my death. I must escape with Jacob and his parents.* She had no idea how she would escape, only the assurance that it was mandatory. *My only other choice is to terminate my pregnancy. But, what if I did that and Jacob was the father? I could never forgive myself.* Rachael had never been so confused and insecure.

A few days later, on a hot June evening, Rachael met with Jacob behind her barracks. They held each other tightly for several minutes, saying little. Then, abruptly, Jacob patted Rachael’s stomach, saying, “You must be getting a little extra food, Rachael.” We’ve all been shrinking for the past couple of years, but your little tummy seems to be a bit larger.” Jacob laughed at the thought. Rachael was suddenly frozen with fear. *Does he know? Did Moshe tell him?* She stared back at Jacob, wide-eyed. *Should I tell him that I am pregnant?* She trembled with fear. *Is this the right time?*

Then, Jacob changed the conversation by saying that he had big news for her. “Rachael, I have found a way to escape and join the partisans. We know that they fight against the Germans everywhere. Besides, if we stay here, it is only a matter of time until we are deported to a death camp.” Rachael could see the excitement in Jacob’s eyes. He was clearly very devoted to this plan. Suddenly, the discussion of her protruding abdomen and pregnancy was left far behind. She felt immediate relief, but nagging concern. She promised to tell Jacob about it soon.

“How would we escape?” Rachael asked. “Where would we live?”

Jacob was silent for a moment. “Rachael, we would need to get in shape.

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We would need to be able to run – a lot. We will need to be faster on our feet than ever before. I've heard that the partisans live in the mountains. They move from camp to camp, escaping the Germans and hitting their troops. They attack the Germans with explosives and then they run.”

Jacob was positively radiant while discussing the escape plan. For the first time in a long time, he felt useful. “Rachael, some of the men from Salzburg and I plan to escape and join them. But, I told them that I would not go without you. I will also ask my father and mother to go with us, of course. But, I fear that he will not leave his patients here. The problem is, if he stays here, he will probably follow them in death.” They held each other in silence for several minutes. Rachael was still afraid to say anything. Finally, Jacob spoke... “Rachael, please just think it over. We can decide next week. Is that all right with you?”

Rachael nodded that it would be fine with her. However, as Jacob described the life that he proposed for them, Rachael realized that she would have problems. *How will I be able to “hit the Germans and run from camp to camp” while pregnant or with a small child? Many dark thoughts flashed through her mind. If I tell Jacob that I am pregnant, will he abandon the life that he so clearly desires. Would he remain here with me? If I keep the baby, will the Nazis kill it? If we stay here, will all three of us die at the hands of the Nazis? What would happen if Jacob discovered that Strobel raped me? Would Jacob then abandon me? If I have a child with blonde hair, would Jacob always wonder if he was the real father? Rachael's mind continued to spin, relentlessly, impetuously, leaving the rational world behind. Dear God, what should I do?*

After a moment, Jacob became more serious. “There is something that I must tell you.” He paused for a moment, and then continued. “Rachael, my mother is sick.”

Rachael replied, “Yes, I know darling. She has not been helping us at the school for about a week now. Has your father told you anything? Jacob was silent for a moment. He then replied in almost a whisper, “My father said that it looks like typhus.” He seemed near to tears. “She needs medication and there is almost none to use. For the first time in my life, my father seems to me to be very frightened.”

Rachael met with Jacob on that hot June evening with the intention of telling him that she was pregnant. Now, with the news that Jacob was planning their escape, and that Hanna was sick with typhus, she was no longer certain. *Should I have an abortion? Is it the right thing to do? It would be only natural to avoid bringing a child into this evil world. The Nazis would kill the baby. But, what if there was a chance that they could save the child? And, do I have the right to make that decision on my own? What would Jacob want me to do?*

That night, Rachael had the most vivid, lifelike dream ever. It was unlike any other dream in terms of clarity. It felt like real life to her. It was astonishingly frightening, as life had truly become. And, it was incredibly painful. In her dream, Rachael was in a hospital. Everything was white... the walls, floors, ceilings, the linens, the curtains, the doctors and nurses. Only their red eyes, above surgical masks, were visible. *Those glaring, penetrating, terrible red eyes! Dear God, make them go away!* Her baby was coming. She was having hard

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contractions. The pain was overwhelming. The nurses kept ordering Rachael to push as hard as she could. Each time there was a contraction, the pain became even more unbearable. She strained and pushed as hard as possible. The doctor said something to the nurse that Rachael could not hear. He spoke in German, not Yiddish. And, there was a bright red swastika on the front of his surgical mask, on top of his mouth. Rachael was distraught. "Where am I? What is wrong?" she cried. "What is happening to me? What is happening to my baby?"

The white-gowned nurses gathered around Rachael's head and pulled her up as far as they could. "Now, push!" The nurses were unrelenting. *Why do they want it done so quickly?* It seemed as though they wanted Rachael out of there as fast as possible. *But why would they want me to be done and out so quickly? Is someone waiting for me outside? Should I be afraid of someone waiting outside?*

Suddenly, Rachael felt the largest and most painful contraction yet. She screamed in pain. "PUSH HARD," ordered the doctor, as he reached inside to grab the baby's head. Rachael finally felt the baby moving out. "I have the head now, little woman, but you must push as hard as possible with the next contraction." Rachael noticed that the doctor never actually looked at Rachael's face, not even when addressing her. She thought that was strange.

The final contraction arrived, and with it Rachael pushed as hard as she could. The pain was excruciating. It felt as though her soul was being ripped apart. *Oh, my God. The agony! The agony!* She screamed again as the baby's shoulders emerged into the doctor's arms. And then, with one final scream and push, it was over.

After a moment of silence, the doctor looked at Rachael with his haunting red eyes and said, "You have a son." Rachael's mind was in turmoil. *Who is the father? It should be easy to tell. Her beloved Jacob is dark-skinned, with dark hair and brown eyes. That murdering Nazi officer that raped her was light-skinned, with blond hair and blue eyes.* Rachael was more frightened than she had ever been in her life, even more than when she was raped. *What if Strobel is the father? Could she care for and nurture the child of such a monster? Could she love such a child? Is this a dream?*

The doctor clamped and cut the cord, held the baby up by his feet, slapped him on the back and then cleared the baby's mouth and throat. Rachael heard the first sounds of her son as he moaned and then began to whimper. The doctor gave the baby to the nurse who wrapped the child in a white towel. Finally, the moment Rachael feared had arrived. The nurse walked over to Rachael and began to hand the child over to her. Rachael pulled back. She wanted to run away. She wanted to be anywhere except that delivery room. *I can't bear to look! I haven't the courage!* Now the nurse was standing next to Rachael, holding the baby out for her to take. Rachael looked the other way.

"Do you not wish to hold your new son?" asked the nurse. Suddenly, everyone in the room was staring at her. "What's wrong?" asked the other nurse, as they all looked at each other. "Here, take your child," said the nurse standing next to her, pushing the baby forward for Rachael to take. She reluctantly put her arms out. She struggled to see the baby's features. Only the child's face was

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visible. His hair was under the towel. The eyes were...

Suddenly, Rachael heard a terrible racket. Noises and shouts were coming from everywhere. She shuddered, turned around in bed and... woke up in her barracks. It was morning roll call at Theresienstadt. *It was a dream!* As she began to drag herself out of bed, the woman in the spot next to her said, "You must have had a very bad dream, child. You were screaming in your sleep."

Chapter 24

The Commandant's End

With each passing day, Strobel became slightly more unhinged. The stolen radio clearly threw him into a destructive series of events. He was out of control. On July 19th, Strobel entered the camp school just as the children were leaving. He told everyone to leave except Rachael. Hanna stared at Rachael, looking for a clue of what this meant. But Rachael simply looked at the floor as everyone left the building. When they were finally alone, Strobel moved very close to Rachael.

The temperature in the school building must have been over 100 degrees on that hot summer afternoon. But, for some reason, Strobel was not perspiring. Rachael, however, was now dripping in perspiration. For some time, Strobel simply stared at Rachael, as he had done before. But this time, something was different. Strobel was different. His eyes were different – somehow even more evil.

Without warning, Strobel slapped Rachael's face as hard as possible. Blood began to drip from her nose. "Look at me, Jew-bitch," he ordered. "Look at my face! You tricked me into wanting you, didn't you? You Jews can do that, I'm told. You can enter someone's mind and control them. That's one of the reasons for 'Special Orders.' That's why all of you must die. You Jews plan to control the world. But, we won't let you. Yes, we will exterminate all of you!"

Something was very different about Strobel, thought Rachael. Spittle was flying as his deranged commentary continued. For the first time in many months, Rachael was afraid that Strobel no longer cared for her. That brought real fear to her heart.

"I know who your family is!" thundered Strobel. I know that your husband is named Jacob. I know that the two of you married while here, without permission! I know that you spend a lot of time in the hospital, with Dr. Silverman. Could he be your father-in-law? Now, my dear, you will tell me where my radio is. If you do not, I will kill Dr. Silverman and his son, Jacob! Do you understand?"

Rachael was petrified. Strobel was a different person. Something had snapped inside his evil mind. His severe behavioral change coincided with the arrival of his wife, about a month ago. He acted as if the sexual intercourse with Rachael had never happened. He showed no remorse towards Rachael. In fact, he was now an angry and dangerous animal, threatening the people that Rachael most loved.

Abruptly, Strobel turned and walked to the door. At the edge of the doorway, he turned and looked back at Rachael. He had the look of a madman. "You have twenty-four hours to tell me where the radio is, or I will kill your husband and your father-in-law." With that, Strobel left the hot room, as dust flew about

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the air behind him.

Rachael went directly to Jacob after her horrific meeting with Strobel. She tried to tell him about Strobel's threats, but Jacob was consumed with his new escape plan. Jacob was a leader for the first time and it felt right for him. He was excited. It felt like his destiny had arrived. He told Rachael that he was prepared to die, although he would prefer to die fighting. But, Jacob would speak only of their impending escape. She did not have an opportunity to tell him the horrible truth.

That night, Rachael could not sleep. *Should I tell Strobel about the radio? Why would I risk my husband's life and my father-in-law's life for something as simple as a radio?* Yet, something deep inside her mind told Rachael to stay the course. The time for brutal honesty had not yet arrived. Perhaps it would never arrive. More than anything, she feared losing Jacob. Something tugged at her conscience. *If it is true that the Nazis mean to exterminate every Jew in Europe, then it is better to fight than to die willingly.* Jacob is right. *We should escape, if it is possible.* Rachael knew that Jacob believed this. She believed that Moshe also believed it.

As morning arose on July 20th, Rachael was prepared to die and to have her family die, rather than to give in to this deranged commandant. At 9:00 o'clock, Strobel called her into his office.

Strobel looked unhinged to Rachael. He was nervous, unkempt and constantly smoked. One cigarette after another disappeared into his ashtray. His hands were noticeably tremulous. But, it was his eyes that frightened Rachael the most. They looked like the eyes of an animal that had been trapped. They looked wild. He also now had a twitch in his face that seemed to grow more pronounced as he became increasingly angry.

Rachael stood in the center of Strobel's office trembling. She heard Jacob's barracks outside the window marching off to the munitions factory. *My true love is out there.* Strobel lit another cigarette with a trembling hand. Then, with a shaky voice, he said, "You will now tell me where the radio is, or I will kill those whom you love." Strobel's face twitched below his left eye.

Rachael was frightened, but continued to stand silent, although her legs were now visibly shaking. "I will never tell you," whispered Rachael. "You are evil. All of you are evil." Rachael was on a run now and did not want to stop. Suddenly, Strobel struck her with his fist. The blow sent Rachael back and down to the floor. Blood streamed into her mouth. Strobel had broken her nose. Yet, Rachael found the strength to stand again.

"Where is it?" Strobel screamed at her. The twitch on his face was now quite pronounced. "Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?" Strobel continued to scream at Rachael. He paced back and forth in his office. He was out of control. He paused only long enough to light another cigarette.

Suddenly, Strobel stopped and began to stare out of the window. He seemed to be in some type of stupor again. For several minutes, Rachael stood in the center of Strobel's office, occasionally wiping blood from her face.

After a few minutes, Strobel turned to Rachael and said, "Come with me while I kill your family." He grasped her arm as they left the office and walked

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back to the barracks. They walked in silence past the school, past the laundry, past the commissary and all the way to the infirmary. As they burst into the infirmary, Strobel raised his handgun. "Where is Dr. Silverman?" thundered Strobel. The nurse pointed to Moshe's office.

Strobel and Rachael entered Moshe's office at precisely 10:00 o'clock. He was looking at X-rays and patient reports. He seemed surprised as Strobel entered the room with Rachael. He looked out into the hospital and saw that virtually all of the patients and the nurse on duty were staring into the office. Slowly, Moshe walked around Strobel and Rachael and closed the office door.

"What do you want, Herr Commandant?" asked Moshe, in his deep baritone voice. He seemed to be attempting to size up Strobel. Rachael had told Moshe of times in the past when Strobel had acted strangely, like the stupors. Moshe was now concerned for the safety of Rachael.

"I want the radio, you stupid Jew," screamed Strobel. Spittle came out from his mouth as he screamed this. Some of it settled upon his chin. It seemed to flash and blink in the sunlight coming through the office window. Strobel was trembling now in fury, and he refused to let go of Rachael's arm. His face was now twitching uncontrollably.

"What radio?" Moshe asked. Suddenly, Strobel's pistol came smashing down on top of Moshe's head. Moshe winced with pain as blood trickled down the side of his head. It formed a small pool upon the shoulder of his white physician coat. Rachael pulled back from Strobel, but his grip was too tight.

"Don't try to fool me, you stinking Jew!" Strobel continued to send spittle out. His wild-eyed expression was frightening.

Moshe stood his ground, compressing the wound on his scalp. "I'm afraid that I do not know about any missing radio," he whispered. "But I'm certain that this woman has nothing to do with it." Moshe was attempting to calm the now-demented commandant, but Strobel would have none of it.

Suddenly, Strobel aimed his pistol at Moshe's forehead. "I give you three seconds to tell me where the radio is – either of you! If you do not, you will both die."

Rachael's heart was pounding furiously. Although she was more frightened than at any other time in her life, she was also steadfast in her refusal to give Strobel the information he wanted. In fact, she was proud of stealing the radio. It had become the first true independent act of her life. Rachael knew that the Nazis would kill her anyway. It was just a matter of time. She was glad that she would die with Moshe, whom she loved so much. She smiled at the thought that Jacob would go on. *If I die with Moshe, at least Jacob will escape and join the partisans.*

For the first time since Rachael was forced into the ghetto and then sent to Theresienstadt, she felt safe. She knew that she was about to die, and so her long-held fear of death was almost gone. She would die standing up, as a Jew... as a human being. And, she would die with the fetus inside of her. Her only regret was that Moshe would die with her. She loved him as she had loved her own father. *At least I will die fighting them.* Nothing could bring Rachael to tell about the stolen radio. In fact, Rachael suddenly felt that stealing Strobel's radio

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was the most important thing that she had ever done in her life.

Strobel saw Rachael smiling and hit her with the pistol. The blow came across her face and she was engulfed in pain. Part of her cheekbone fractured below her right eye. She also felt something in her mouth that was not there before. She pulled it out with her free hand. It was one of her molars. This changed her expression to anger. "I will never tell you anything. You are a pig." Rachael screamed this through the blood in her mouth and some of it landed upon Strobel's shoulder. He stared at it and pulled back, as though it was poison. Observing his reaction, Rachael spat a huge wad of blood and saliva at him. Some of it landed upon his face.

"If that's what you prefer, my little Jewish bitch, then look what you receive." Strobel brought his pistol up and aimed it at Moshe's face. He cocked the weapon and prepared to fire. Strobel extended his arm as far as possible, to avoid having Moshe's blood on his uniform. Moshe stood firm and began to speak softly.

Rachael could barely hear Moshe over the sound of the fan in his office. *What is he saying? Is he talking to Strobel? It is almost inaudible. No, he is not even looking at Strobel.* Rachael listened as hard as she could to hear what Moshe was saying. Apparently, Strobel also heard Moshe speaking softly and demanded to know what it was he was saying.

"What is that you say, Jew doctor?" Strobel demanded. But Moshe just continued mumbling quietly. Suddenly, Rachael recognized it. *Moshe is saying the "Shema."* It is the prayer that all Jews are supposed to say in the morning, the afternoon, the evening, when the Torah was opened and on the Sabbath. It is also a prayer that Jews utter before their death. It is a reaffirmation that there is only one God. *Moshe is now preparing himself to meet our one God.* Rachael admired Moshe for his strength and courage. She had never seen anything like it. Most men would tremble, cry and cower before being shot. Moshe was at peace with the world, even with his Nazi tormentor. He was the bravest man she had known.

Rachael watched as Strobel's finger squeezed slowly on the trigger. It seemed to happen in slow motion. Rachael screamed "no" as Strobel squeezed harder on the trigger. Suddenly, an arm pulled Strobel back from his pistol. The pistol fired. The sound of the shot was deafening in the small office. Because someone or something pulled Strobel's arm, the bullet whizzed past Moshe's left ear and disappeared into the wooden wall. Strobel let go of Rachael and turned around quickly.

Standing in the doorway was Field Marshal Heinrich Himmler, resplendent in his black uniform, circular glasses and narrow mustache. He was furious. His dark eyes were wide open and his lips curled under in a fierce grimace. Apparently, Strobel had forgotten about the visit from Hitler's right-hand man. Strobel was stunned and began to stammer at Himmler. "Herr Field Marshal, I... I must apologize, but these Jews know something and I must..."

"Shut up!" screamed Himmler. Apparently, word of Strobel's mental degeneration had also reached the Field Marshall's office. Three equally angered SS officers accompanied Himmler. One of them now pried the pistol from Strobel's

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hand. Himmler and Strobel exchanged glances. With a sense of finality, Himmler announced, "This is your replacement, Colonel Heydrich. He will take over until we locate a permanent replacement for you. Consider yourself relieved of command, Strobel." He glanced at his junior officers. "Take him away!" he ordered.

Himmler glanced at Rachael, and then looked at Moshe. His eyes were as black as coal. Rachael shrunk away as soon as she looked into his eyes. *I have never seen such terrifying eyes!* There could be nothing but evil behind those murky eyes, thought Moshe. They reflected nothing that Rachael could recognize, only malevolence. This man appeared to simply be doing his duty, relieving a deranged officer. But Rachael knew that she and Moshe were only provided with a respite. Strobel might not kill them today. But this man, Himmler, could see to it that they were killed one day soon. He sniffed the air, twice. For a moment, he glared at them. Then, sternly, he said, "What did Strobel want from you?"

Moshe and Rachael exchanged confused glances. Finally, Rachael spoke in a shaky voice. "He thought that we knew about a stolen radio." Himmler continued to glare at them, and sniffed the air again. Moshe thought that he was covering some fear. Himmler certainly did not wish to be in close proximity with these Jewish prisoners.

Finally, in his most stern voice, Himmler replied, "And, do you know about it?"

Rachael and Moshe shook their heads at Himmler. Then, as abruptly as he had entered, he swiveled in the narrow hallway and left the building.

After the door closed, both Rachael and Moshe let out a huge breath, as if they had been holding it the entire time. Rachael looked at Moshe. They both burst into tears and held each other tightly for a very long time. All that mattered was that they would live on for at least one more day. As horrible as their existence was, they were glad to be alive.

"I do not like that man," whispered Rachael.

"Nor do I," replied Moshe. "There is nothing but evil around him."

Field Marshall Himmler and his three SS officers left the hospital as quickly as they arrived. They dragged the combative Strobel to the Commandant's Office and locked him in.

Chapter 25

A Plan For Freedom

The next night, Jacob met with his parents and Rachael behind Barracks IV. It was a hot mid-summer evening, about an hour before sunset. Crows were bellowing raucous messages to each other in the nearby forest. A band of sparrows that had nested in the bushes near the barracks chirped loudly. White smoke rose from a nearby munitions factory, drifting into the distant horizon. The sky was turning pink, although thunder in the distance suggested the potential for a storm. Or, could it have been artillery? Everyone prayed for rescue by the Allies. Whenever a thunderstorm approached, the prisoners rejoiced in hope – only to see their hopes dashed with the approaching rain. Would the war finally come here? Might they be rescued? There seemed no other possibility to avoid death.

Jacob kissed his parents and Rachael quickly. He was extremely excited, almost agitated. He was so immersed with telling his important news that he did not notice that his mother looked gravely ill. He hugged Moshe, as they always had done. When he tried to kiss Hanna, she backed away. Moshe interceded, “Jacob, your mother is very sick. I’m sorry, but she has typhus.”

Jacob was stunned. Although he had seen his sister-in-law, Anna, die from typhus – and he had seen hundreds of others with typhus – he somehow felt that it would never strike his own family. Now, hearing from his father that his mother had been infected, Jacob was shocked. He gathered his courage. “Well, you can help her get well, can’t you father?”

Moshe smiled and looked at Hanna lovingly, but offered no guarantee to Jacob. Instead, he softly said, “if only we had medication.”

Jacob was stunned at his parent’s appearance. They had both lost a great deal of weight. Hanna was now extremely thin. She was so emaciated that he might not have recognized her were they not close. Her eyes were sunken and her hair, which had been shaven upon arrival, now was growing back thin and mostly white. She seemed to have aged twenty years in only two years of hardship. Moshe lost his razor and had now several months’ growth of beard. It came in white and changed his appearance drastically. Jacob thought that his father now resembled an old, wizened Rabbi. Moshe had also lost weight and his face was thin. Wrinkles and folds appeared where his skin had been smooth. While in their early sixties, they now looked like they were in their eighties.

Jacob looked carefully around both sides of the barracks. When he was certain that no one else could hear their conversation, he began. “I have some very important news. Listen carefully. You know how the men’s barracks are all adjacent to the forest? Well, Hershel discovered that the men of Barracks XXII have constructed a tunnel into the forest. It goes underground all the way up the hill behind the camp and opens up just a few meters away from the entrance to the forest.”

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Rachael watched Jacob's face as he told them about the tunnel. He was excited, although in a controlled way. Rachael had always seen Jacob as a youth, or adolescent. For the first time in their relationship, she now saw Jacob as a man and as a leader of men. He had suddenly matured, in this nightmare of horrors. She was impressed with Jacob's courage. But, she was also deeply concerned about their safety. Lying just below that thought was her condition. *Would he allow me to go if he knew that I was pregnant?* Rachael also noticed for the first time how gravely ill Hanna had become. She looked as though she had a fever and was very weak. She was frightened to see her mother-in-law so ill.

Jacob continued to tell his story. "The date is set for July 22nd. The escape will start at 10:40 p.m. There will be no moon on that night and the timing is for just after curfew. Roll call for the evening will be over and the guards will be relaxed, perhaps even asleep. I've established a leadership role with the group." Jacob, who became even more restless, continued. "I told the men that I would not go with them unless my family came along. They agreed. Most of the men in Barracks XXII are separated from their families. So, you must be ready to go. We will need to coordinate how each of us will leave our own Barracks and meet together at XXII."

Rachael watched Jacob in silence. She also watched Moshe and Hanna. Their faces beamed at the new Jacob. He was now a man and a leader of men. They were clearly proud parents. But something was wrong. She could feel it. And, while struggling to process Jacob's plans, she felt something move *inside her*. It wasn't much. In fact, most women would have dismissed it as indigestion or gas. Somehow, Rachael was certain that it was her fetus. For the first time, the child she carried became real to her. Before, it was always the *thought* of a child. But this new physical act had somehow made the child very real and very near to her. The startling revelation apparently showed on Rachael's face. Jacob stopped talking and stared at Rachael. "Are you ill?" he asked.

"No, I am not," whispered Rachael.

Following a long silence, Moshe spoke. "Jacob, we love you so much. Of course, we would normally go with you. But, your mother has a serious illness. She cannot travel." Jacob refused to accept this. "Of course she can go. We have already been in contact with the partisans. They can provide medicine."

Moshe looked down for a long moment in silence. He seemed to be carefully selecting his words. "Jacob, what kind of physical strength do you need to crawl through a long tunnel, and then run through the forest? What if the Germans begin to chase us? Even if we escaped, think about how the partisans live out in the forest, in the heat and extreme cold. Jacob, can someone with typhus do these things?" Moshe paused for a moment, gazing into Jacob's eyes. Jacob was angry, but accepted his father's words. Moshe was the wisest man that he had ever known. His wisdom made him sought after by the entire community. Jacob had never known his father to be wrong. "You know, son, that even before your mother's illness, we are not young people. We are now both in our sixties. We... cannot live the life of partisans, Jacob."

Jacob was not ready to give in. "But, father, we can find a hospital for mother. Or, perhaps a local family will take her in." Jacob suddenly stopped and

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looked at the ground. He realized that he was now speaking beyond reason and logic. He gazed down at his shoes.

Moshe responded, "Jacob, you know from your own experience in Salzburg that the Germans will not allow Jews in any hospital. You also know that it is illegal to shelter Jews. We cannot expect strangers to risk their lives for us. Why would they, Jacob?"

Rachael watched silently as Jacob wrestled with this conflict. *He loves his parents so very much.* Yet, something deep inside was pushing Jacob in a direction that none of them had anticipated. Somewhere inside of Jacob's soul, a leader was emerging. It was his destiny to lead an escape. With every fiber of his being, Jacob understood that he was meant to lead his race from slavery to freedom. Like a modern Moses, it was his destiny. His soul was screaming at him to escape and to help others escape. It was an unrelenting splinter in his brain, driving his every waking moment. He had to go. Now Jacob looked at Rachael.

"Will you go with me?" Jacob looked as though he might explode at any moment. He had never experienced this kind of powerful conflict. Rachael replied, "I am your wife and I will go wherever you go. That is, if you want me to go." She seemed somewhat tenuous in that remark, thinking about the life that was now growing in her womb.

"Of course I want you to go," said Jacob. "I could not bear to be away from you. But, I find it so difficult to leave my parents." Rachael put her arm around Jacob's shoulder. She too wanted to remain with Jacob's parents. She loved them deeply.

"I understand, Jacob," whispered Rachael. "I don't want to be separated from them either. But, sometimes we must do what is best for our future. And, I do not believe that we have much a future if we remain in the hands of the Germans." There was a long pause before she spoke again. "Jacob, we can follow them. We can persuade the partisans to help us. One day, perhaps we can rescue them."

Moshe interrupted, "Jacob, you must go. People are now depending upon you as their leader. Take Rachael and go to the partisans."

Moshe glanced at Rachael, providing an understanding smile. His eyes were moist.

Yes, my son," whispered Hanna. "I have always known that you would be called upon to lead your people. You and your wife must go on. God will decide what will happen to us."

Moshe was unrelenting. He knew that Rachael would begin to show her pregnancy soon and that a concentration camp was no place for a pregnant woman, particularly after the recent German decree forbidding Jewish women from having children. It is better to die in an escape attempt than to be put to death by the Nazis, he thought. "Rachael can go with you, if she so chooses. However, I must remain here, to take care of your mother. Perhaps, there will be a way for us to go with you sometime in the future."

Jacob seemed to struggle with this thought. "After the Germans find our tunnel, they will be on constant guard. There won't be another one. And, father, how much longer will the Nazis allow you to stay here before deporting you to

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the east. You know that nobody comes back from deportation.”

Moshe looked back into Jacob’s eyes and then gave him a long, tight hug. Tears were in his eyes when he began to speak. “I hope that we will find each other when the war is over. But, my place is with your mother, and your place is with your wife.” Moshe looked at Rachael and winked. Somehow, that simple gesture gave Rachael surprising new confidence. He looked at Rachael and softly whispered, “Don’t worry my dear, go with your husband and everything will be fine.” Rachael glowed with renewed enthusiasm. She was Jacob’s wife and no matter who fathered the child she was now carrying, being Jacob’s wife was more important than anything else. That simple statement from Moshe gave Rachael more confidence and fortitude than she thought possible.

Jacob was torn by the thought of being separated from his parents for the first time, particularly with his mother’s illness. Tears now flowed down his face. “How can I leave you here?” They held each other closely for another moment, saying nothing. Then Jacob looked up at his father and said, “I promise that I will find you, father. No matter what happens, I will find you. I will bring medication for mother. Do you understand?” They kissed each other on the cheek and left, returning to their separate barracks.

Chapter 26

The Forest's Protection

The evening of July 22, 1942, was a typical summer evening at Theresienstadt.

It had been a hot and humid day. A great thunderstorm overnight had left large puddles around the camp. Himmler was gone, leaving a new Nazi colonel in charge of the camp. With no new orders, camp routine was back to normal. People walked constantly through mud and avoided huge puddles of water.

After dark, more than thirty Jews from various camp barracks slithered silently to Barracks XXII. They selected the date because there would be no moonlight. They crept silently from shadow to shadow. When they arrived, Rachael stood by Jacob's side. He spoke to the large group quietly. "We will go out in the tunnel in groups of four. When you reach the end, you will be about twenty meters from the forest."

Everyone's eyes were glued to Jacob's face. Every ear strained to hear his words. This would be no foolishness in a crowded pub. If the Nazis saw them outside of the compound, they would shoot first and ask questions later. "Someone told me yesterday that the guards have been digging out there with a big machine," he said. "So, you might have to go through it. Don't worry, you will just get some mud on your clothes," he laughed. It was a nervous laugh and he was instantly sorry about it.

Hershel, who also stood by Jacob, then spoke. "Yes, my friends, just some mud. As though you haven't had any mud on your clothes for a while." They all laughed this time. Jacob was grateful that Hershel broke the stony silence. Everyone was tense.

Now, it was Rachael's turn. With a loud "Shhhhhush!" she commanded silence. "Do you want every Nazi in Europe to hear you?" Jacob and Hershel looked at each other with surprise.

Jacob whispered in Hershel's ear, "We might have another leader here." They smiled at each other.

Jacob continued, in an authoritative tone. "Once you reach the forest, partisans will be waiting to greet you. Our signal with them is to make a sound like an owl. The first thing that you must do is change clothes. So, wear two layers of clothing. They will be looking for dirty people – people who look like they have been crawling to escape. That would be a sure sign of our identity if a German patrol discovers us, or if we are seen anywhere. We must look like everyone else. We must blend in. Although we will spend much of our time in the mountains or in caves, there will be time that some of us will need to go into a town and blend in." He paused to collect his thoughts and continued. "Above all, you must *not ever* speak Yiddish after our escape. Any other language will do, as long as people can understand you."

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“Now, listen carefully,” Jacob, said in a voice lowered for effect. “We are not escaping in order to run away somewhere to be safe. We are escaping to be fighters. We promised to join the partisans to help them fight. I must tell you in all honesty that the last communication we had from the partisans was not very positive. Many of them believe that Jews lack the will and ability to fight. They believe that we are all weak-kneed accountants or lawyers. If you are not willing to put your life on the line and fight with us, please go back to your barracks now. Rachael, Hershel and I are prepared to die, if necessary – rather than remain prisoners and slaves of the Nazis. Are you?” Jacob searched everyone’s face. He saw fear, but also commitment. “Will you learn how to use guns and knives and dynamite?” Everyone nodded in agreement.

“We’re with you, Jacob,” said Adam Levy.

Jacob smiled at his new ensemble. For the first time in his life, he had assumed a leadership role. As he sorted through his emotions, he realized that the role fit him like a perfect glove. *I was born to do this. Every event of my life has been in preparation for this moment. I felt this when I tried to save my friends from being beaten by Nazi youth. This is my purpose in life. I must now make good on it.*

Jacob threw his meandering thoughts away and continued his speech. “There is something else I must tell you, and it is critical. Each of you put aside any preconceived notions about the partisans. Some of them are Gypsies. Some of them are communists. Probably none of them are Jews. You may find that some of them hate Jews, almost as much as the Nazis. Whatever they say, whatever happens, you must help them and work with them. You must promise me that you will never fight them. Take whatever they say to you and let it go. They did not have to help us tonight and they are taking a great risk in doing so. We must learn how to be soldiers from them. We must accept their orders. Does everyone understand me?”

Jacob’s soldiers looked him square in the eyes and nodded that they understood everything that he had said to them. They eagerly accepted him as their leader. There was no competition, although Shlomo, the person who made contact with the partisans, also considered himself to be among the leadership group. But, Jacob had earned the respect and admiration of everyone he met. Like Moshe, Jacob endeavored to accept people for who they were. He rarely said bad things about anyone. People also accepted Jacob’s tender, gentle nature. He always saw the best in people, never the worst. And now, for the first time, he was their leader.

Jacob completed his speech. “Fine. We will go out in eight groups of four, with one group of five.” Hershel asked which of them preferred to go together. It was determined that Shlomo would go with Hershel, Jacob and Rachael leading the way in the first group. They would locate the partisans and help the others find their way.

At 11:00, when the guards normally changed their shift and created a lot of noise, the group opened the tunnel door, which was underneath the barrack’s stove. There it was – a perfectly circular tunnel, more than large enough to crawl through. With heart pounding, Jacob went in first, reminding the group to keep

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absolutely silent, as he disappeared into the tunnel. Rachael, then Hershel and then Shlomo followed him. He carried a candle in one hand. The dirt was dry and crumbly this far below the surface. Torn and broken tree roots pressed through the sides of the tunnel.

The tunnel ran straight down almost five meters before it became horizontal. There was enough room to crawl, but not to stand up. Jacob suddenly wondered what would happen if someone had an attack of claustrophobia. *It is too late to consider that possibility.* The tunnel was completely dark and silent. The air smelled of damp earth. Jacob lit two candles, keeping one and handing the other to Hershel. He admonished the group to extinguish them before they reached the end of the tunnel. Slowly and carefully, they crawled through the tunnel. Along the way, they lit candles which had been shoved into the walls, to light the way. Although there had been heavy rain recently, the tunnel remained deep and dry. Roots from trees periodically pushed into their sides. The tunnel seemed to go on forever. Jacob's elbows and knees began to ache from bearing his weight so long. *My God, I hope that we do not have a cave-in!* It struck him that many of them could die before breathing free air. He could hear the others grunting in pain behind him as he continued. Although everyone was afraid, the anxiety was accompanied by a feeling of exhilaration. *We are crawling towards freedom.* This was followed by a feeling of terror. *Dear Lord, help me to become a good leader. Don't let me fail.*

After some twelve minutes of crawling, Jacob reached the end of the tunnel. The men who completed the tunnel had tied grass and some small bushes to a flat piece of wood that fit solidly over the large hole at the end. They ascended not by a wooden ladder, but by placing their hands and feet into pre-cut holes in the earth. One step at a time, Jacob walked up the side of the tunnel to the top. He placed his hand flat upon the square piece of wood at the top and blew out his candle. Before Jacob opened it, he stopped and waited for the others in his group to reach him. This took about two minutes.

Jacob looked down at each person before he began to speak. "Listen to me carefully," whispered Jacob. "We'll need to put out the candles and then wait for a minute until our eyes adjust to the darkness. When we go out, we should be just about fifty meters from the tree line, below the south end of the camp. We heard yesterday that the Germans were digging some kind of trench back here. But, we have no idea if it's true or what to look for. Then, we will go up the hill beyond the trees and locate the partisans. If you are close enough to speak to someone, and you do not know the person, the code word is 'freedom.' When we reach the trees, one of us will need to come back and escort the next group into the trees. Are there any questions?"

They looked at each other silently. "Now, blow out your candles and follow me," said Jacob. Each person blew out his or her candle. They were now encased in complete darkness, five meters below the earth's surface. Jacob's heart was pounding as he pushed the wooden tunnel "door" open. It moved up silently. He stuck his head out, above the ground and inhaled deeply. He suddenly clutched his stomach and began to retch. The air above the end of the tunnel was rotten with a horrid smell. Two years ago, Jacob would not have been

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able to identify it. But now, after years of captivity, starvation and disease, he instantly recognized the stench of rotting flesh. Vomit raced up his throat and into his mouth. Somehow, he was able to swallow it and control his urge to regurgitate. He could hear the others behind him struggle and retch in reaction to the terrible smell.

The world was almost completely black. The only light came from the searchlights of the camp, far behind them. Jacob turned around and looked back down into the tunnel. One candle was still lit and he saw the frightened faces of his comrades. "Listen to me. There is a very bad smell up here. It smells like rotting animals or corpses. We cannot afford to have everyone up here vomiting. Even at this distance, the guards in the watchtower will hear us. When you come up out of the tunnel, you must breathe only through your mouth. That will enable you to tolerate the stench. Remember, breathe through your mouth only – not your nose! Do you understand?" Everyone nodded their heads.

As Jacob crawled out of the tunnel, he looked to the forest for a landmark. He found nothing but a soft velvety darkness. *This must be what it feels like to be blind.* The others crawled out behind Jacob and hunched on the ground next to him. Almost everyone began to retch and cough from the terrible smell. Despite Jacob's warning, it seemed impossible to avoid the reeking stench. The ghastly smell seemed to penetrate everything. The darkness was perfect. It was as though a black, velvet curtain was covering them. Only the stars were visible. Jacob was still puzzled. *Where the hell is the forest?* There was more retching behind him as several of his friends vomited. Jacob returned to them, furious. "Breathe only through your mouth!" he whispered as loudly as possible. Still, there was more gagging and choking before the group finally seemed to be able to tolerate the revolting odor.

While Jacob's friends crawled up into the pitch black, he looked up at the stars, sparking above. They were of no help. *Where is the forest? I can see where the camp is, but which direction should we go?* He was confused. Jacob had not calculated this. He assumed that the lack of a visible moon would only make it easier to escape. Now he had to deal with the problems associated with total darkness. Adam Levy crawled next to him. "What the hell is the source of that atrocious stench?" Jacob looked at Adam and could not see him. He could not even see his profile. It was like speaking into blank darkness. "It is the smell of rotting flesh, Adam. But, the question is, why is it here?"

They sat in silence while the remainder of the party exited the tunnel and crawled to them. "Could it be an animal?" asked Adam. The odor was so intense that Jacob found it difficult to keep from retching again. Although he had no idea that the infirmary had been emptied, he was suspicious about how the Germans dealt with embarrassing situations.

"I have a feeling that our German 'friends' may have killed many of the prisoners. Perhaps these are people from the infirmary. My father told me this morning that the SS had cleared out many of his patients." He heard a few gasps from the group behind after he mentioned the sick prisoners to Adam. *I should not have said that!* Jacob suddenly realized that some of his friends had close friends or relatives in the infirmary. The thought that they might now be dead

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was a distraction. *The last thing I need these people doing right now is being distracted by another fear.*

"Listen," whispered Jacob. "I can't see the tree line, but we are still facing the same direction as we were when we opened the tunnel door, which is southwest. That's where we need to go. But, we must remain together. Although we cannot see it from here, there is a guard tower behind us and over the hill. It's not more than seventy-five meters, so our sound might carry to them if we speak to each other."

Shlomo, who had just emerged from the tunnel, whispered in a high-pitched voice, "What's that horrible smell?"

Then, Jacob heard Rachael's voice in a whisper. "Oh, my God. I can't stand that odor. It's horrible." Everyone had passed by rotting corpses in the past two years. It was wartime. With the extent of sickness at Therezin, particularly typhus and malaria, death was a constant companion to the Salzburg Jews. But, no one could have been prepared for the hideous stench that arose near the tunnel exit.

Jacob was becoming very concerned. He imagined that the others were at least as frightened. If the Germans heard people talking here, they would shoot first and ask questions later. *We cannot remain here. If we stay here, we will die.* Jacob could hear the others rustling near him. "I'll go first," he said. "Each person should take the hand of the next in line." Jacob paused to take a deep breath. His heart was pounding. Slowly, carefully, he inched his right foot forward... and fell head over heels into a huge open pit.

Jacob heard the others falling into the huge trench behind him. To their credit none of them let out a scream. Instead, he heard their muffled grunts, thuds and splashes. He was dumbfounded. *How could we be falling into a deep trench? It should not be here! There should not be anything but flat land this far from the escape tunnel. This is supposed to be smooth land! Just last week I was here and all of the land here was flat!* Jacob had this confusing train of thought as he was tumbling head over heels down an embankment that should not exist. He reached the bottom and landed on his back with a thud that took his breath away. A splash informed him that water was at the bottom. His arms swayed and reached around, slapping into mud and water, and something else. *What happened? Two days ago, I personally observed this hill coming back from the munitions factory. It was covered with grass and it was a gentle slope, not this cliff that we fell from.* As Jacob tried to regain his respiration, his right hand began to explore something that he could not at first identify.

The others landed near Jacob, each uttering a brief grunt when they hit bottom. He was worried that the guards might hear them. However, his attention was equally divided in trying to identify the "thing" underneath his right hand. It was smooth on the surface, but had some bumps that seemed strangely familiar. Then, he felt something that he recognized – hair. It was a woman's hair. Within seconds, Jacob knew what his hand was resting on. *It is someone's face!* He experienced an instantaneous flashback to the feeling of walking upon "cushions" during the synagogue fire. He now was on top of a pile that felt strangely familiar. As he passed his hand across that face, his index finger fell into a hole

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on the forehead. He looked over to see what it was, but again, it was pitch black. His heart thudded desperately in his chest. He felt around the rest of the face. There were no wrinkles. The body was small, perhaps a girl or adolescent. She had long hair. Her dress had ruffles. Instantly, Jacob retched and fought a deep wave of nausea. The inert body of a girl broke Jacob's fall. It was Sarah, the beautiful child with blonde hair and bright blue eyes.

Within seconds, each of the others had similar reactions. Someone uttered a brief, eerie shriek. Rachael spoke first in a panic. "Jacob, where are we? What are these...?" She stopped in silence.

Hershel then spoke in a whisper. His voice, which was normally a baritone, sounded like a soprano's. "Jacob, I'm around bodies. I think that we are in some kind of cemetery."

Then Shlomo spoke. "Yes, I can feel bodies around me too. What happened? Where are we?"

He heard Adam's voice nearby. "Oh dear God, where are we? What is this place?"

Soon, Jacob heard retching next to him. It was Rachael vomiting. In a moment, he heard the same retching from Hershel and Shlomo. The stench, which was overwhelming at the top of the "cliff," now seemed to envelope them. With each breath, the stink of disease and death, mixed with the odor of feces and urine entered Jacob's lungs. He envisioned the molecules of this hideous smell landing inside him. Jacob wondered if such inhalation could be deadly. Fighting approaching panic, Jacob tried to focus in this most disturbing moment of his life. He felt certain that the others would find it equally abhorrent.

Jacob was on the edge of sanity. He wanted nothing more than to be back in his bunk in the camp. *Yes, deport me. Send me to the gas room. Kill me. Nothing could be worse than this. No preparation for something like this could be anticipated. In fact, who could believe that something like this could exist?* The escape was unraveling. All around him, Jacob heard splashing, grunting, retching, gagging and vomiting. *Dear, sweet God. We're making a terrible racket! The Germans are bound to hear us! We've got to do something. No, I have got to do something! If I truly am a leader, the time for action is now!*

Jacob forced himself to stand up. He had to walk on top of the dead bodies to reach the others, again bringing thoughts of the terrible synagogue fire. "Listen to me carefully," Jacob told the group. "Remember what I told you about breathing only through your mouth. Now, if we continue making noise, we'll be recaptured. So, be quiet!" His order seemed to be working as the group's noises decreased. "We must reorient ourselves and get out of here." Adam whispered, "Yes, let's go." "I'm all for that," whispered Hershel. "But how do we get out, and which direction should we go?"

Jacob stood up, looked around and then moved close to the others. "We must move so that our backs are to the side of the cliff that we fell from." As he moved, the water in the bottom of the trench made a squishing noise. He stopped quickly and listened. He heard nothing. Gradually, in silence, Jacob moved Rachael, Shlomo and Hershel to the back of the cliff. He stood in front of them. "Listen, the forest is straight ahead. We can't see it, but I am certain that we will

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be going in the right direction. He grabbed Rachael's hand. "Rachael," he said. "Take Hershel's hand. Hershel, Take Shlomo's hand. Now, let's get out of here. If you get separated, let's use this sound to reach each other," as he clicked his tongue inside his mouth.

Jacob slowly slogged back into the terrifying, corpse-filled trench, holding onto Rachael's hand tightly. They had to move excruciatingly slowly, to avoid making sounds in the water at the bottom. Once again, Jacob was "walking on pillows." The thought of standing upon people made Jacob feel ill. But, there was no other apparent way to cross the trench and move into the forest. So, again, he walked upon faces, stomachs, legs and throats. Some of the corpses were lying on their backs. Some were lying on their stomachs. Others on their sides. It was impossible to see. So, the group had to go carefully and slowly. *My God, we are making a lot of noise!* Suddenly, there was a loud splashing sound from behind. Everyone froze. Someone had slipped and fell back into the trench with a loud splash.

From far above, Jacob heard the sound that he feared most. A German guard was shouting into the darkness at them, asking them to identify themselves. Then, another voice joined the shouting. Jacob's heart was pounding hard and fast. "Oh, my God, Jacob. What should we do?" It was Rachael. She sounded horribly frightened. Then, the sounds of the guards came closer. Their flashlights were visible on top of the trench. It sounded to Jacob like several guards were approaching. He heard their boots and weapons clicking and thumping. His heart jumped into his throat. *We will be caught!* Jacob realized that the guards were almost at the edge of the cliff. He could see their flashlights moving back and forth over the trench.

"Lie down," Jacob suddenly ordered the group. "Whatever happens, you must not move a centimeter. You must become one of the dead." Jacob dropped to the ground and heard the others do the same. In a moment, the guards were at the edge of the trench, shining their flashlights down. Suddenly, Jacob could not remember if he had closed the tunnel exit. If the guards saw a piece of wood with grass and bushes tied to it, the escape would be a disaster. *Did I put it back?* Jacob was tormented with the thought and its associated fear.

The flashlights searched through the trench. Guards shouted down at them to identify themselves. Jacob was on his side and could see the length and breadth of the trench when the guards had their flashlights trained upon it. *Oh God. There are dozens and dozens of bodies here! How many of them are there? The Germans must have emptied the infirmary, brought all of the patients here and then shot them at the edge of the trench.* The shouting continued for another minute or two. The lights ran across Jacob and his group two or three times. There was no movement. Thankfully, the group was covered in mud from their fall. Jacob thought that they indeed must have been blending in with the dead.

Finally, one of the guards was heard berating another guard. Jacob heard him say something about dogs and leaving corpses around for them to eat. Slowly, the small group of guards turned around and began walking back to camp. The flashlights, which momentarily offered some sense of direction to the forest, went away. They were again in total darkness.

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When he thought that the guards were far enough away, Jacob began to get up. Suddenly, he saw a white light coming out of the darkness on top of him, near the edge of the cliff. He didn't know what to make of this until he realized that the second group of escapees had reached the end of the tunnel. Jacob was suddenly very angry. *Someone in the next group forgot to put his or her candle out!* Quickly, Jacob moved up to the edge and whispered as loudly as he could, "put that out!" Quickly, the candle was extinguished. Jacob was in total amazement. *If they had come out of the tunnel only one minute earlier, the Germans would have been right on top of them.*

Jacob told Shlomo to go back up the hill and warn the next group about the trench and the bodies. "Tell the next group to walk around the trench and then to the forest. Also, tell one of them to go back and warn the third group about the trench. And, tell them about our signal to each other." Jacob repeated the clicking sound with his tongue. *At least no one else will go through the horrific surprise of falling into a pit filled with corpses.* He took Rachael's hand and told her to take Hershel's hand. Hershel took Adam's hand and one by one the escaped prisoners crawled up and out of the trench, walking on hard, flat land. They began to walk towards the forest and precious freedom.

Jacob was grateful to have flat earth below his feet. The feeling of walking upon people, dead or alive, was hideous. The stench of the bodies remained well after he had left the trench. Jacob wondered if it would ever disappear. It made him nauseous to think about it again. Jacob turned and looked behind. There were absolutely no landmarks to guide him, other than the faint light of the distant watchtower. He could only guess that they were walking in the right direction. Finally, after what seemed an endless journey, they reached the forest. They were now walking upon fallen leaves among tall trees. Their footsteps made a crunching sound in the dense leaves with each step. However, Jacob felt certain that they were far enough away from the camp. It would not matter.

Jacob stopped at the edge of the tree line. "Hershel, you must stay here and guide the others into the forest. Remember the sound," he said as he again clicked his tongue inside his mouth. Hershel replied with his version of the same sound. "I will wait here for them. Don't worry about it Jacob. Find the partisans." They shook hands and wished each other good luck. Then, Jacob and Rachael went into the forest, followed by the rest of the first group.

It was still pitch black inside the forest and many obstacles awaited the escaped prisoners as they walked. Every few seconds, someone would stumble upon a tree root or smash their foot against a rock. It was maddening to have to walk without seeing. Jacob was worried about the other groups. *Can they avoid falling, as our group had? Can they avoid making noise? Certainly most of the others, if not all, would vomit from the stench. What if someone screams? At least they will have been warned about it.* Jacob now forced himself to focus on finding the partisans.

For what seemed to be at least an hour, Jacob and Rachael led the prisoners as they stumbled through the forest on the southwest side of the camp. Jacob, who normally had an excellent sense of direction, was beginning to lose track of their location and direction. Rachael could feel the same thing. They paused for

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a moment to catch their breath. It was suddenly quiet. Jacob was amazed at how loud their footsteps were, crunching upon the dead leaves and branches of the forest floor. Rachael whispered into Jacob's ear "Do you know where we are?" Jacob thought for a moment. He was frightened and he was certain that Rachael was at least as frightened. It would make her feel worse if he told her that he was lost. As he opened his mouth to say something, he heard the sound of someone, walking nearby. Suddenly, there was a light in the forest about thirty meters away. It was a flashlight. It sounded like several people were walking towards them. Jacob's heart pounded in fear. *Who is it?*

"Hello," whispered Jacob towards the people with the light. He could hear them whispering. To his great relief, they were not speaking German. It sounded to Jacob like Czech. Again, Jacob spoke. "Hello... we're over here." Again, much whispering followed. Finally, after what seemed like a minute or two, the group with the flashlight came close enough for a look. The light was directed at Jacob and then at Rachael.

Finally, someone spoke in Yiddish. "Are you from the camp?"

"Yes," replied Jacob. "And you?" After a brief silence, the same person spoke.

"We are the partisans of Chrusciel." Jacob looked around as nine or ten armed partisans emerged from the darkness. They looked like partisans, brandishing a variety of small arms and ammunition.

The person holding the flashlight came close and brought it up towards his face. He was of medium sized build, with curly brown hair and he had a growth of beard of perhaps a week. He wore totally black clothing. His voice was low and commanding, but he seemed to be rather young – perhaps still in his twenties. And, he spoke Yiddish! He extended his hand to Jacob. "My name is Anton Chrusciel." Jacob shook Anton's hand with both of his.

"I am Jacob Silverman. This is my wife, Rachael." Anton smiled at Jacob. When he looked at Rachael, his glance turned into a stare. He gazed, open-mouthed at Rachael for quite a long time.

Finally, Anton grasped Rachael's hand and kissed it. "I am enchanted to meet you, my dear."

Jacob was thrilled to see Anton. This completed his successful escape from Theresienstadt. There were no casualties. He felt tremendous relief. His first attempt at leadership was triumphant. However, he did not like the way that Chrusciel gazed at Rachael. Something about that long stare between Anton and Rachael was wrong and it bothered Jacob greatly.

After kissing Rachael's hand, Chrusciel continued to stare at her for a moment, their eyes locked together. Finally, he turned to Jacob. "You two have been into some trouble, eh? You smell bad. What happened?"

Jacob told Chrusciel how the tunnel had ended just over the edge of a new German ditch that had not been there when the tunnel had been completed. "As we left the tunnel, each of us fell into a large trench filled with corpses. I believe that the dead are from our infirmary. You see, the commandant did not want the Red Cross to see how many prisoners were sick with typhus and malaria. It's supposed to be a model camp for the Germans. There were at least a hundred

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people crowded into the infirmary. Conditions were deplorable. We had no medicine, no nursing staff. My father is the physician there, but he can do little to help the sick. So, the commandant took almost everyone from the hospital out to the edge of camp, near the forest, and he had them shot. Their bodies fell into a large trench they had already dug. It was so dark when we came out, that we all fell into the trench, on top of the bodies. Then, the Germans heard us so we had to hide under the bodies.”

Jacob’s voice fell as he recalled the claustrophobic feeling of being with so many bodies. Everything there smelled like decomposing flesh. That horrid odor still clung to them, like taking a part of death along with them.

Chrusciel and his small group of partisans listened to Jacob attentively. They now paused, glancing at each other, to consider what Jacob’s group had just endured. An hour later, the second and third groups joined them in the forest. Everyone made it alive and well, if not frightened out of their wits.

After a moment, Chrusciel turned and said, “All right, let’s move out. Prepare for a long and difficult climb. If you can’t keep pace, you should not have escaped.” Jacob and Rachael followed him up a very large hill and through the forest until they reached a large cave. Jacob was now glad that his parents had not come along. Neither of them had the capacity for such a strenuous journey. Two hours later, they neared the entrance to a great cave.

The opening of the cave was covered with a very large tarp. When they passed through it, they saw that the cave was enormous. It was filled with red light, as people scurried along, working intently on various projects. Inside were at least two or three-dozen people. They stopped working to study the newcomers. Most of the people were young. Jacob guessed that they were anywhere from their teens to their thirties. A few of them were older, perhaps in their forties or fifties. They all wore dark clothing and some of them had covered their faces with a dark material, like shoe polish. Some of those people passed them, moving out of the cave into the darkness. They carried bags with what Jacob assumed to be explosives. He turned to look at Chrusciel, who was smiling broadly at him. “Welcome to the partisans!” Jacob looked at Rachael. Their eyes met and they embraced for a long time.

Chapter 27

Life With The Partisans

About half an hour after Jacob arrived at the cave, a second group of escapees was brought in. They had not moved as quickly as the lead group. They looked and smelled as bad as Jacob and Rachael did. But, they were alive and well. The second group included David and Emily Berg, Shlomo Rosenberg, Mordechai Feldman and Adam Ginzburg. They told Jacob that Hershel Farber had decided to stay and assist, in case any other prisoners left the tunnel. Jacob thought how brave Hershel must be to help others when freedom was so near. *What a wonderful friend I have in Hershel!*

When Jacob went back into the cave to find Rachael, he was annoyed to see that Chrusciel was sitting next to her while she ate. He was irritated with Chrusciel for staring at Rachael. It made Jacob very nervous. Still, he was excited to be working with a man like Chrusciel. Although he was young, he seemed to command the attention of everyone around him. To the partisans, he was clearly a hero and their leader. They seemed totally loyal. But Jacob could not stand the way that he gazed longingly at Rachael. Jacob was certain that his intentions were not entirely altruistic. He looked on in jealousy as Chrusciel moved closer to Rachael and put his arm around her shoulders.

Within an hour, all the members of the escape group had made their way into the cave. They hugged each other and shed many tears of joy. Jacob was thrilled that the escape was accomplished without the loss of anyone, even if they had to make their way through a corpse-filled trench. It was clearly the most gruesome task that any of them had been through. But it was worth it to again be free. Jacob meanwhile was feeling his oats. His mind was filled with thoughts of victory. *I am a leader! They followed me into freedom!*

When everyone was safely inside the cave, Jacob sat near a fire, brooding about Chrusciel and his intentions with Rachael. Hershel, Shlomo, Mordechai, Adam and David soon joined him. These five men, ranging in age from twenty-two to thirty-nine had bonded well. They were like brothers, and would give their lives for each other. Now, they sat together for the first time as free men. It was a sobering and joyous moment.

“What’s wrong Jacob?” asked Hershel. “You don’t seem happy.” Jacob smiled at Hershel. For a long time, Jacob had admired Hershel. He now regarded Hershel as a true and valiant brother. Jacob managed a brief smile. “My parents are still inside. My mother is sick. Although I am here with my bothers, I am also still there, with my parents. I cannot be happy until they join us in freedom. You know, Hershel, that the longer they remain inside Theresienstadt, the more likely they will be deported.”

Shlomo then spoke. “Yes Jacob, we understand.” He looked at David, Hershel and Adam, who all nodded their heads. “We will help you get them out.

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Just give us a plan and we will accomplish it... or die trying.” Jacob looked admiringly at his loyal friends. *Such true and loving brothers could not be found anywhere!* “Yes, my friends, I know that you would do this for me. I am so grateful to have found each of you. You know, my parents feel the same way about you. They don’t know you as well as I do. But, they admire you just the same.” After a long silent pause, he spoke again. “We must rest from our escape and from our starvation. All of you need to gain weight and recover your strength. We cannot help our loved ones, friends and relatives inside the camp until we are strong, eh?” The others nodded silently in agreement.

Jacob got up and walked to the fire, joining Rachael. Chrusciel was still huddled next to her, admiring her closely. Jacob was irritated, but he decided not to speak of it. After all, Chrusciel and his partisans risked their lives to help save them. He would not appear ungrateful, even if he was jealous.

“What is our next objective?” asked Jacob.

Chrusciel opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by Rachael. “We are going to blow up the railroad tracks near Theresienstadt.” Rachael seemed very enthusiastic about their first joint mission. The excitement in her eyes was obvious to Jacob. He too was excited about giving the Germans something back. But he was also deeply concerned about how Chrusciel was attracted to Rachael.

“When will we do it?” asked Jacob.

Chrusciel replied, “In two-to-three weeks, on or about August 12th. The Krauts move everything by rail, including tanks, boats, food, water, all kind of supplies and troops. Many troops are moved on rail. This can really set them back in this region. We’ll pull this one off in daylight. But first, we must track all regular troop movements near the target location. We can’t afford to be surprised by the Krauts.

Chrusciel got up and dusted off his trousers. He smiled at Jacob and said, “Let me introduce you to the rest of our group. Unfortunately, many of them are out on a mission tonight. But some are still here.” Jacob was impressed. Two missions on the same night must have involved a great deal of risk. Should both have been failures, the partisans would have been seriously depleted of members.

The two leaders walked together deeper into the cave. Jacob admired Chrusciel for his leadership and bravery. He also was surprised at his age. They were, it seemed, about the same age. Jacob decided to find out. “How old are you?” Jacob asked Chrusciel. “I’m twenty six. Does that surprise you?” Chrusciel gave Jacob a long gaze and asked, “And just how old are you? It’s hard to tell under all of that mud.” They laughed together for a moment. Jacob had forgotten that the prisoners were all covered in mud and stench. “I’m almost twenty-one. Where are you from?”

Chrusciel spoke as they walked deeper into the cave. “I’m Hungarian. I was born and raised in Budapest. My parents are still there, I think. I haven’t been home for more than a year now. I have two sisters. They are younger, eighteen and fifteen. I think that the Nazis have been slow to destroy Hungary, so far. As long as they don’t know they are related to me, they should be fine. So, I assume they are still in good health. I was planning to become a lawyer. Now...

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who knows? You haven't asked about my religion yet."

Jacob, who was listening attentively, gave Chrusciel a brief smile. Ruggedly handsome, Chrusciel had thick curly brown hair that fell across his forehead, landing just above his eyes. He was taller than Jacob and much heavier. Anton's face was slightly wide, with piercing brown eyes and a firm chin. A dimple arrived in the center of his chin when he smiled. He could have passed for a Jew.

"No, I have not asked about your religion," said Jacob. "You are not Jewish are you?"

"No," replied Chrusciel in a soft voice. "I am Christian. But I am not very devout. I had some Jewish friends in Budapest, from school. I admire you Jews. Most of you are polite, intelligent and friendly. I also admire how so many of you go on to university and become professionals. Education is the key to success. You Jews know that and have the courage to follow through. I don't believe the Nazis' propaganda about how Jews plan to control the world. There are so few of you, you know. How could you pull it off, even if you wanted to? But I hate what they are doing to you. They are destroying my country, but they are exterminating your people."

Jacob smiled again. He was beginning to admire him. "What have you heard about other camps for Jews? Do you know about the deportations?" Suddenly, Chrusciel's demeanor changed. His eyes frowned deeply. They stopped walking, standing still in near darkness. Jacob could barely see Chrusciel's face. But even in a shadow, Jacob could see that Chrusciel was troubled. He began to select his words carefully.

"Jacob," Chrusciel began slowly and in a deeper voice that was now almost a whisper. "The Nazis are doing terrible things to your people. We have sent long-range observers to assess German operations throughout Eastern Europe, from eastern Poland to the Rhineland." He paused for a moment. In the silence, Jacob was frozen in fear. He felt his heart begin to race. For the first time, he was about to receive a truthful report about the deportations and "forced labor" camps that everyone was hearing about. He assumed that everything he had heard in the past was simply rumor, perhaps with a nugget of truth. But, Chrusciel had no reason to deceive Jacob. He would be telling him the truth, no matter how good or bad it might be.

Chrusciel continued in a low but firm voice. "You must now brace yourself for some very bad news, Jacob. I can see already that you are my friend. I do not wish to hurt you. But, you should know the truth." He paused briefly. When he continued, he looked into Jacob's eyes. "Jacob, the Nazis have built death camps all over Germany and Poland. They have imprisoned Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and political prisoners by the millions. In these death camps, they are mixed with communists, criminals and prisoners of war. The strong prisoners are selected to work in forced labor camps, mostly in munitions plants. But most of the rest are killed. And Jacob, the vast majority of those killed are Jews. The Nazis force people into the camps, mostly by train. Wait, one of our observers is here. I'll let him tell you about it."

They walked deeper into the cave until they reached a small area with a

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fire, surrounded by several people. As they neared, one of the men spoke. "Welcome Anton. Was the mission successful?"

The man who spoke was older than most of the partisans that Jacob had seen. He seemed to be about fifty. The man was mostly bald, with a large frame. Jacob guessed that he was very tall, although the man was still sitting. "I would get up to shake your hand, Anton. But, you know, my injury prevents it. I am sorry.

Chrusciel extended his right arm towards Jacob. "My friends, this is Jacob Silverman. Jacob and his companions have all escaped from the Therezin camp. They had a nasty fall into a trench filled with bodies and they had some trouble with directions, with no moon tonight. But we found them and they are all safe. They are now our companions and fellow partisans, eh? Everyone smiled at Jacob. Jacob bent down to shake the man's hand.

Chrusciel continued by pointing at each of his trusted council members. "This is Walter, who has visited many other camps to observe the activity there. Jacob looked at Walter with wide eyes.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Walter replied.

Chrusciel continued talking. "This is Edward, Johan, Maurice, Cecil, Jean-Paul, Leon, Joseph, Albert and our resident physician, Emil. This is our infirmary. Each of these brave partisans have been injured, most of them shot by the Germans. But they will soon recover and return to their duties, eh?" The group all nodded their heads and offered enthusiastic replies. In an instant, Jacob could see that each of these men would die for Chrusciel. "These patriots came from several different countries. But, they have one common goal, to hurt the German war machine. They hate the Nazis for destroying their homeland. Most of them have lost loved ones. But they will never stop fighting."

Chrusciel nodded at Jacob. "Let's sit with them for a few minutes Jacob," he said. Jacob sat next to the man called Walter. After a moment of silence, Anton continued. "Walter, could you please tell Jacob what you have discovered in observing the Nazi camps?" Walter was middle aged, with a short, thick salt and pepper beard. His thin brown hair was pushed up, revealing a large bald spot. Walter looked a little old to be running with the partisans. However, Jacob judged him to be in excellent shape.

Walter looked at Jacob for a moment, perhaps sizing him up, and then began with a question. "You are a Jew, yes?" Jacob nodded his head in affirmation. "Well, Jacob, I have some very bad news for you. You have heard rumors about the Nazi death camps, yes?" Jacob again nodded his head. He wanted, for a moment, to tell Walter to shut up. Jacob wanted to know the truth, but at the same time was desperately afraid of it. *What if there really are death camps? What if I could really be made to burn the bodies of innocent people? If it is true, then it means that my parents are in more desperate trouble than I had realized. It also means that I might never see my relatives and friends again!*

Walter paused for a moment and then began to speak slowly. "I have observed nine Nazi camps, in addition to the Therezin camp. The Therezin camp is, as I'm sure you know by now, only a transportation center. Jews from Western and Central Europe, along with Germany and Austria are moved into Therezin

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until the Nazis decide what to do with them. Sometimes they are moved into forced labor. Mostly, they are moved... elsewhere." Jacob watched intently as Walter was selecting his words carefully.

"Tell me about... elsewhere," Jacob asked in a firm voice.

Walter looked down for a moment, as though he was deciding how much truth to tell Jacob. Chrusciel saw this and said, "Walter, I want you to tell Jacob everything. He is our comrade now. He is one of our leaders."

Walter nodded and continued, this time in a hoarse whisper. "The Nazis move Jews around almost exclusively by train. But there are German killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen* that follow the regular German SS troops. Whenever the troops locate Jews, they call in the *Einsatzgruppen* to shoot them. I watched many times as hundreds of Jews were lined up and shot – for no reason at all, except that they were Jews. This included women and children. If the Germans discover a lot of Jews, say in a village or a city, they make the Jews dig huge trenches just outside of view. Sometimes the trenches are in a forest. They then march all of the Jews right up to the edge of the trench. When the Jews are in a line, German Army trucks pull up. Hidden inside, Germans with machine guns open the flap across the back of the truck and shoot them all. The sound is deafening. The Germans have to wear safety plugs in their ears. And, it takes several minutes of constant shooting to kill them all. Many times, the machine guns break due to the tremendous heat produced. If any of the Jews run away, they are shot as well by other SS or *Einsatzgruppen*. Then, the Germans simply filled in the trench. It was unbelievable to observe. In a matter of a few minutes, all of those Jews had suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth." Walter suddenly stopped and looked down. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and took a deep breath, before he continued. "I am not ashamed to tell you that I cried like a baby in that forest. I saw it again in another forest and I cried then as well."

When he looked up again, he had fire in his eyes. His voice became firm again. "You see, they wiped out entire villages and small cities, without a reason." Walter watched as recognition suddenly appeared upon Jacob's face. *Yes, I remember the man escaping in the forest from the train, along with the other Salzburg Jews.*

Jacob interrupted. "Yes, when we were transported on a train to Prague, we saw a man running through the forest. He had the Jewish star on his striped clothing. Germans with machine guns shot him. The Germans were entrenched in different places in the forest with guns. And, they hid the big machine guns inside of trucks! It could not have been only to shoot one man. There must have been many other Jews."

Walter nodded his head. "Yes, Jacob. What you saw was the *Einsatzgruppen* in action. I have seen this happen seven times. I have heard the same from others in the partisans and elsewhere. I am certain that the *Einsatzgruppen* have done this all across Europe."

Jacob bowed his head and softly said; "Tell me about the other camps."

Walter shifted his position and grimaced in pain. He moved his long legs from under each other and stuck them out towards the fire. Walter had been shot

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in the arm and he cradled it gently against his side. Jacob was wrong. With his legs now stretched out, Walter was a giant of a man. As he extended his legs he seemed for a moment lost in thought. It seemed to be painful for him to tell Jacob what he had seen. Nevertheless, he continued in a soft but firm voice.

“I traveled first into Germany. There are two camps in Austria, called Mauthausen and Gusen. I asked some villagers about those two camps and they told me that very little happens there. There are no longer any Jews in the cities of Germany. Christian Germans now occupy the Jewish-owned homes and neighborhoods. Many of them are German army officers. They received the nicest Jewish homes as a reward for allegiance and good service to the Fatherland. If there are any Jews in the countryside, I could not tell. I doubt it, since virtually everyone in Germany would be rewarded for turning in Jews who were hiding.”

Walter paused for a moment, drank from a canteen and then continued. “There is a camp in Germany called Dachau. On the main gate, which is very large and made from black iron, it says, ‘Work Makes You Free.’ It is a death camp, Jacob. The Nazis first brought in a lot of political prisoners, communists and people who didn’t like the Nazi way of life. They called them ‘enemies of the State.’ As of two years ago, they began to bring Jews in. I was told that most of the Dachau Jews die from starvation and disease. I heard that thousands died from malaria and that others died from medical experiments gone awry. Mostly, the Germans didn’t need to kill them. They died on their own. Those who remained healthy were sent to work at German factories. Of course, they received no pay and were forced to walk many miles each day to and from work. Almost all of the prisoners at Dachau are men. When I left to return here, I spoke with a small group of partisans. Two of them actually work inside of Dachau. They told me that they were hired to build a new brick building called ‘Baracke X.’ It was supposed to house a gas chamber, disguised as a shower room, and four cremation ovens. The new Baracke X also has four disinfection gas chambers, designed to kill lice in clothing with something called Zyklon B, the same poison gas that was to be used to kill the Jews.” Walter paused for a moment, and then stared directly at Jacob. When he continued, his mouth was set firm and his jaw jutted out, as though he was fighting tears. In a hoarse voice, he said, “Jacob, they mean to gas Jews to death and then burn the bodies in a crematorium.”

Jacob suddenly shivered. “Are you all right?” several of the group asked simultaneously.

It is just like my dream! “Yes, I’m fine,” said Jacob in a hoarse voice. He struggled to control himself as a wave of nausea washed over him. “I had a nightmare about being in such a crematorium almost three years ago. I was... shoveling... bodies.” Jacob could not finish. He looked down and saw that his hands were trembling. He quickly put his hands behind his back so that the others could not see his anguish. When he looked up, everyone was staring at him. *What have I done? I’ve said far too much. Now, they will think that I’m some sort of lunatic.* For a long moment, he simply stared back at them in embarrassing silence.

Walter broke the momentary group trance and continued, “There are other camps in Germany besides Mauthausen; they have names like Sachsenhausen,

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Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, and, for women, Ravensbrück. I did not observe all of them. But, other reliable observers in the partisans told me about them.

Cecil suddenly interrupted, with his high pitched voice. "I heard that the Germans allowed many of the Jews to leave, if they could obtain an exit visa. Unfortunately, few countries would take them in – not even the Americans. So, they had to stay and die."

Walter paused for a moment. He looked around the group on the floor. Finally he spoke. "Albert, have you any wine left?" Albert opened a large cloth bag that was on the floor in his corner. After shuffling around inside the bag for a moment, he produced a half-filled bottle of wine.

"This is the end of it Walter," said Albert. "Take it easy."

After lifting the bottle to his mouth and drinking some wine, Walter continued. "Jacob, the worst that I have seen and heard about is in Poland. There is a camp called... no it's really two camps, called Auschwitz-Birkenau. The one called Auschwitz is next to a small Polish town called Oswiecim, but the Nazis call it Auschwitz. The camp has a reputation for torture, medical experiments and mass shootings. The other camp, called Birkenau, is about 4 kilometers away."

Walter looked at Emil. "Hey, Emil, didn't you have a brother in Poland, near the place we are talking about?"

Emil looked at Jacob, then back at Walter. A small, thin, bespectacled man, he seemed pale and fragile. He seemed hesitant to speak, but was urged on by Walter and Anton. Emil began in a very soft and low voice, barely audible. "Yes, I spoke with my brother who actually worked in the camps. Some partisans there were bricklayers when they built it, and others were responsible for cooking and cleaning the officers' quarters. They knew a lot about the two camps. Until March of this year, the camp was for male prisoners only. I think that many of them were Russian prisoners of war. But then they started moving in Jews from the camps in Germany, Austria and other countries to the west. Just like Dachau, the Germans started using poison gas to kill the prisoners. The German company "Degesch" produced this poison gas. I know this because one of the local partisans worked for that company. The prisoners were gassed in underground cells in Block 11. A gas chamber was rigged-up just outside the main camp and in February, two temporary gas chambers opened at Birkenau. In March, a women's camp was established at Auschwitz with thousands of inmates. That's all that I can tell any of you." He seemed disgusted with the conversation and very angry about the trouble of discussing it.

Again, Walter paused to drink some wine. Then, with his voice lowered, he continued. "Those deported to Auschwitz arrived at the nearby train station and were marched or trucked to the main camp where they were registered, tattooed, undressed, deloused, had their body hair shaven off. The prisoners in the good line showered while their clothes were disinfected with Zyklon-B gas, and entered the camp under a gateway inscribed 'Arbeit Macht Frei', just like Dachau. Jacob, the partisans told me that a parallel system operates at Birkenau, except that for the majority, the "showers" are gas chambers. One of the partisans told me that he read on an officers' desk that over 100,000 prisoners were killed there

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so far. And, that was more than a year ago. Apparently, they also conduct medical experiments on the prisoners, sometimes without the use of anesthetic.”

Jacob was devastated. For more than two years he had insisted to himself that it was only a nightmare. It had no relation to life. It was only a bad dream. Perhaps he had eaten something that disagreed with him. But, he had not for one minute believed that it would happen to him. Suddenly, his world was turned upside down. He was trembling. Yet, his mind could only focus on one thing – his parents. *Dear God, they killed more than 100,000 Jews? I must get my parents out!* For the first time, Jacob realized that his dream was a premonition. That recognition now hit him hard. *The nightmare was a gift! It was a true vision of the future! I must prepare for my true role and find a way to rescue mother and father.*

Walter took another sip of wine and handed the bottle back to Albert, who placed it back inside the bag. He then continued. “Well, Jacob, I was told that several other death camps are in Poland. They told me that some friends were hired to build another death camp in a place called Sobibor. It was also to have a gas chamber and crematorium. Finally, they told me of the same type of construction project at a place called Treblinka, or something like that. I’m not so good with Polish names.”

The group sat in glum silence for several moments. A few stared at Jacob. Each person seemed deep in thought. Jacob was astounded. *My dream is coming true! I am destined to work in a crematorium. Can I escape that destiny? A deeper and even more frightening thought entered. What if I cannot rescue my parents? Will they die in such a place? Dear God, what should I do?*

Suddenly, Chrusciel spoke. His voice startled Jacob. “My friends, we must make some very important decisions. As you know, we work in cooperation with the Allies. They assist us in selecting our targets. As partisans, we are dedicated to destroying the German war machine, not rescuing prisoners from Nazi captivity. Yes, it is true that some of us have close friends and relatives in such forced labor and death camps.” He looked at Jacob when he completed that sentence. He continued, but in a softer voice. “Perhaps, more than anything in the world, we wish to free our loved ones. But, comrades, our goal is to disrupt and destroy German war plans – not to free prisoners. If we can free prisoners along the way, and gain wonderful new friends like we did tonight, then fine. But that will never be our objective.” Chrusciel again looked at Jacob. “Do you understand?”

Everyone in the group in the infirmary nodded their heads and agreed with Chrusciel, except Jacob. He could not stop thinking about his parents. They would surely die if he could not rescue them. He looked down at his hands. They were still trembling.

Chrusciel stood up and stretched his arms over his head. “We have all had a long night. It must be near dawn.” He looked at Jacob again. “Some of us have had a harrowing experience tonight. Let’s get some sleep before we work on our next mission.” Chrusciel and Jacob walked back to the front of the cave where Jacob found Rachael curled up near the dying fire. He lay next to her, but could not sleep. Too many dark thoughts revolved in his mind.

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Near dawn, the cave came slowly to life. Rachael stretched her body, trying not to wake Jacob in the process. They lost no time in embracing each other, leading to a very passionate kiss. Within moments, the lovers were making up for lost time. However, Jacob suddenly received a rude kick in his back. Standing above them was a woman with wild black hair, named Sheba. Sheba suggested strongly that Jacob and Rachael “get a hotel room or get out of the cave.” They looked at each other in total embarrassment. Neither of them had displayed affection of that sort in public. The embarrassment soon turned into joyous laughter.

They looked into each other's eyes and smiled. Rachael suddenly stopped smiling. She quickly said, “I need to speak with you in private.”

Jacob also stopped smiling. “What... now? We need to speak in private right now?”

Rachael continued to stare into Jacob's eyes. She replied in a low and commanding voice, “Yes, we must speak in private right now.”

Rachael had rehearsed this moment a hundred times in her mind. Yet, she was still terrified. She was reasonably certain that Jacob did not know that Commandant Strobel raped her. If he had heard about it, he certainly would have comforted her, wouldn't he? But, reasonably certain was not totally certain. Rachael was afraid that if Jacob knew she had been raped by another man (in particular a very evil man), he would flee from her. She could forever become “damaged goods” to all men. Rachael told herself time and time again that true love could survive anything. But, that tiny crack of fear remained. Now, after rehearsing her speech dozens of times during the past five months, the moment had arrived. Rachael was terrified.

They walked together, hand in hand to a small grove of trees outside the cave. It was twilight, that mysterious time of day when the earth emerges from slumber. Light barely penetrated through the dense forest as the sun had nearly arrived on the horizon. They walked in silence; Jacob because he was drinking in the beauty of his surroundings, and Rachael because of a terrifying subject that she felt she must bring up.

The air was moist and dew had spread on top of the earth. They had entered the cave in the total darkness of night. This was the first time that they could observe its entrance. The cave opening was V-shaped and was embedded into the side of a very large hill. Jacob was not surprised to see that they were at least a kilometer higher in elevation than they were at the camp. They had been walking uphill all night. Large piles of brush were near the entrance on both sides. Jacob assumed that they were meant to cover much of the entrance when the fighters were out. His mind wandered along military tangents. *It is difficult to imagine German patrols here. This location is too remote for any semblance of human activity. Chrusciel selected a perfect base for his operations against the German war machine!*

The morning quickly became hot and humid, as it had been for the past several weeks. Behind them and over the valley, the sky was azure blue, with stars twinkling. Above them, the sky was steel gray, specked with a few soft cumulous clouds. In front of them, past the ragged trunks of small thin trees, the

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sky was bright pink and yellow. There was almost no wind at all. This small corner of the world was eerily silent. Starlings suddenly flew from nearby tree branches and began their incredible display of synchronized flying. In this stately setting, Rachael and Jacob sat underneath the shade of old oak trees and crossed their legs. Their knees were touching gently.

Rachael took Jacob's hand and looked into his eyes. "My hands are so cold," she apologized.

"It doesn't matter," said Jacob softly. "My hands are almost always cold too." After a brief silence, Rachael began her prepared speech, with a quiet, yet firm voice. *Here it is! I must tell Jacob the truth about being pregnant and about being raped. The time for honesty has finally arrived. If he will no longer love me and live with me, I will have to kill myself. I could never live without Jacob. The world would be far too empty and sorrowful. Here I go.*

"Jacob," she began in a shaky voice. "I don't know how to tell you this, except to just say it." Rachael could feel tears coming. She was angry now with herself for losing control over her emotions. "I... I'm... Oh God Jacob, I'm pregnant." Rachael's tears did not drop out so much as gush out. She was embarrassed by this, but the physical reaction was completely out of control. Rachael's entire body shuddered twice as tears flowed over her face. She covered her face to hide her embarrassment.

Suddenly, she felt Jacob's warm hands around her face. She held her breath. *I cannot dare to look at him.* Still crying, she covered his hands with hers. She sobbed into Jacob's hands for a few more moments. Finally, Jacob pulled her face up towards his face and gently wiped her tears away. With abject fear, Rachael opened her eyes. Jacob was smiling at her in a way she had never seen before. *I have seen parts of that smile before! Sometimes, when he is with his father, his eyes light up in the same way. Yes, I know that smile. It is a very good smile!* Rachael was not sure what that expression meant, but it felt good.

Still smiling, Jacob began to speak softly. "I thought that you looked and felt a little different the past few months. But, I did not want to mention it. I thought, perhaps you received a little extra food from the school, or something. Oh, Rachael, you have made me the happiest man in the world. I love you so much." They kissed for a very long time, and then made love under the large tree. Rachael continued to cry, but now she cried from pure joy. Jacob had accepted her pregnancy with complete confidence and joy. He would not reject her. Rachael felt wonderfully free from doubt.

Still, dark thoughts began to creep into Rachael's mind. She had only accomplished one part of her plan. Why didn't she tell him everything? She was suddenly very angry with herself for being weak. *I should have told Jacob that I was raped. I was not completely honest with him. Jacob believes that I am having his child!* Rachael felt as though her mind had been twisted, like an old, wet dish rag. One moment, life was perfect, they next it was mental torment. *I must tell Jacob the truth and the longer I postpone, the harder it will be.*

When they were done, Jacob trotted back into the cave. In fact, much of the way, he skipped like a small child. He was exuberant. He sang and danced with a huge grin. Rachael had never seen him this happy. Their lives had changed

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so much in the past twelve hours. It was difficult to comprehend. They were free now. She too, should have been exuberant. But, she had kept a deep, dark secret from her husband. And, it felt wrong. She walked back to the cave, deep in thought.

Inside the cave, Rachael joined a meeting of the "Council," as they called the leadership group. She had already met most of them. As she sat next to Jacob, Rachael was bombarded by at least a dozen "congratulations," from the group. Everyone was smiling broadly at her. Two of them had actually said "Mazel Tov" to her! Suddenly, she was angry with Jacob for telling all of his new comrades about her pregnancy. She had told Jacob she was pregnant no more than twenty minutes ago, and suddenly, it seemed that most of the known universe was aware of her condition. *Jacob must have told everyone in sight!* She felt conspicuously embarrassed, but in a good way. These people actually seemed to care about her and Jacob. In order to portray herself accurately as a woman of stature and respect, she granted Jacob a glance of sincere consternation. It seemed to work as Jacob shrank down somewhat, like a punished puppy. To the rest of the group, she displayed a shy, embarrassed smile.

As the laughter settled down, Chrusciel began the meeting. "First, let me introduce to the entire group two new members of our Council. This is Jacob Silverman and his pregnant wife, Rachael." This reference to her condition again drew laughter from the group. Although Rachael did not enjoy the group's attention to her condition, her anger was tempered by the fact that these people meant no harm. In fact, they seemed genuinely pleased about it.

One-by-one, Chrusciel introduced the Council members by name and title, and then continued in a firm voice. "Our next target is the rail line that runs from Prague to Vienna. It bends twice near the Therezin camp, once east of the camp, then again just southwest of the camp." With this, Anton produced and began to unfurl two large maps of the region. He placed them in the center of the circle and members of the group immediately began to cock their heads enabling them to view the maps.

Anton continued in his firm, commanding voice. "We will use dynamite. I prefer a plan that not only destroys the tracks, but also will cause the train to derail – simultaneously." Chrusciel paused for a moment to gauge Council support. A quick look around the group told him that they agreed. Many of the members were nodding their head in approval. "I know that this is a dangerous operation," he continued. Looking at Jacob and Rachael, he continued in a softer voice, "In order to derail a train, we must stay near the dynamite until just a moment before the train arrives. Hopefully, the engineer won't have time to stop the train." He turned his head back to the Council and raised his voice. "Since our job is to disrupt German operations, derailling a train with troops and possibly heavy ammunition should be our goal. Does anyone disagree?" Again, Chrusciel gave everyone enough time for others to speak up before he spoke again. There was only silence.

Chrusciel glanced quickly at Jacob, with a wry smile. "Jacob and I will plant the dynamite. Walter, you will scout the tracks and locate the best position for our explosives. Please also consider that we will need to make a very hasty

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retreat when we light the dynamite and that we will require adequate cover nearby to run the line and then hide from the train. Also, please select a spot that can be well defended in case we have to fight the Germans.” Walter nodded his head in agreement but did not speak.

Chrusciel continued his planning directives. “Maurice, you will obtain current train schedules and give me your preferred times for a daylight operation.”

For the first time, Jacob spoke. When he began, everyone listened. “Just so you should know,” Jacob began in a firm and low voice, “on the way back to the camp from the munitions factory, we saw trains with heavy artillery and sometimes tanks just before the last few weekends. Perhaps that is the most efficient time to move such cargo. So, there might be some good targets on Thursdays and Fridays. We always walked back to the camp at 5:00 p.m., and we almost always saw a train. Also, there will be lots of daylight for operations during that time of day through September.” The group again seemed to nod their heads in approval, almost in unison. They seemed to be measuring Jacob. Chrusciel gave Jacob an appreciative nod, saying, “Yes, good work Jacob. That’s useful information. Maurice, please take a look at late afternoon trains, late in the week and on those tracks.”

In the days that followed, Jacob and Rachael met many other partisans and made many new friends. Some had been out on patrol when the group had escaped from Theresienstadt. Others were hundreds of miles away on missions. Chrusciel lead the partisans exactly like an army. Every minute of every day was planned and then re-planned. Missions were rehearsed dozens of times before being implemented. Only the most appropriate partisans executed raids, based upon their talents and skills. Jacob was amazed at how demanding this camp of rebellious citizens had become. Everyone worked constantly, based upon their individual attributes.

The escaped Jews were accepted into Chrusciel’s partisans instantly and with enthusiasm. While the partisans had no particular reason to help Jews, they also knew about the Nazi plans to exterminate Jews from Europe. Some had been inside of forced labor and death camps. It seemed impossible to be humane and not to have some sympathy for the Jews. A few of the partisans were Gypsies. Germans saw little difference between Jews and Gypsies. They were both considered “inferior races,” according to German policy. They were both fit for hard labor and then death. In this general way, the partisans accepted the Salzburg Jews who escaped and were eager to join them.

Among the group of Jews that had escaped were some of the young Salzburg Jews. They included Jacob, Rachael, Hershel, his cousin Rebecca Katz, Claus Singer and Schmuel Goodman. There were eighteen other camp escapees, all but one Jewish. They were from other towns in Austria and Germany. In all, twenty-three people crawled through the tunnel and found the partisans in the forest beyond Theresienstadt. Many of them had fallen into the corpse-filled trench. None were caught escaping. There were no major injuries. In fact, the tunnel was not found until well after roll call the next day.

The escape plan was completely successful, despite the trench filled with

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bodies. Jacob was amazed each time he thought about it. He laughed in his mind. *The Germans must have been furious.* Then, each time he thought about the escape, he thought about his parents. Then, he felt morose. *It is not fair that we are free and my parents are still prisoners!* Jacob was determined to find a way to free them. He brought it up with Chrusciel on at least three occasions. Each time, Chrusciel replied in a soft but firm voice, "Jacob, freeing prisoners is not only terribly risky, but it also does nothing to disrupt the German war machine." In his heart, Jacob knew that Chrusciel was right. The partisans were sworn enemies of the Germans. Their job was not to free prisoners, many of who were too ill and weak to help anyone at all. Jacob realized that the Germans, who would have watchtowers and machine gun emplacements everywhere, would probably slaughter them. He would need to have his own plan to free his parents and execute it himself, or with any of the remaining Salzburg Jews who would follow him.

Life with the partisans was the most unique experience that Jacob had ever imagined. Except for those few who had escaped with him, there were no Jews among the partisans. They were an otherwise eclectic community who shared many natural and political differences. However, they had one thing in common and it directed their every action. They hated the Germans with a passion. Virtually all of them had lost a loved one to German military action. Most had also lost their homes, just like Jacob and the Salzburg Jews. Despite the obvious differences, Jacob and his crew were accepted graciously into their new society. It soon felt like being in a very large family. Many of the partisans were well educated. Some were university professors. They cared for each other, and in most cases, would die for each other.

Almost all of the partisans were well trained for war. They had plenty of stolen weapons, mostly rifles and grenades, and virtually all of the partisans were good with a knife. In addition, Jacob saw a huge cache of dynamite and shoulder-fired grenades. Chrusciel saw to it that his group was well armed and well trained. Almost immediately, he arranged to have each camp escapee trained in the proper use of knives and guns. They also learned a multitude of hand and arm signals, false birdcalls and other methods of communication on missions when speaking was impossible. Jacob felt as though he had returned to Boy Scout training. In less than a week, Jacob and his comrades became demolition experts and motivated fighters of the Chrusciel partisans.

Rachael and Jacob's love continued to mature, with the tremendous excitement that only couples expecting a child can understand. Jacob was easily distracted by the pregnancy. The thought that a new life was growing inside of Rachael was astonishing to him, in a most remarkable and breathtaking way. He found it difficult to stop thinking about their child, even during meetings. To Jacob, these were the best of days. Yet, with his parents still imprisoned in that Nazi camp, they were also the worst of days.

Rachael walked on thin ice emotionally. Her greatest fear, that Jacob would reject the child in her womb, had disappeared. But that solace resided in the shadow of a lie. They had now made the transformation from couple into expectant parents. Soon, Rachael could feel the baby move. For weeks, she had thought

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she felt the baby move. Yet, it could have been anything else. But now, the movements were too strong to ignore as imagination. They were real. And, the first time that she was able to show this to Jacob, he displayed the biggest smile she had ever seen. That smile was burned into her mind. They giggled in delight for hours. She was also grateful that she could now consume a commensurate amount of food for a pregnant mother. Inside the camp, her small caloric intake and irregular access to vitamins had frightened her. Yet, her dreams were haunted by the chance that her baby would resemble the hated commandant, Strobel. *What will I tell Jacob then? Oh, my dear God, what will I tell him then?* She was bewildered by conflicting emotions. *Moshe would know what to do. Oh, dear Moshe. I need you now, more than ever. Should I tell Jacob everything?*

For Hershel, Rebecca, Claus, Schmuell and the others who had escaped, living with the partisans was spectacular. They were instantly accepted into the group. In a way, they were heroes. No one had escaped from Theresienstadt until their bold plan worked. Unlike Nazis and their German and Austrian collaborators, these people did not care that Jacob and his friends were Jewish. Some of the partisans actually respected them for being Jewish. This was an unexpected delight and it made Jacob's comrades work that much harder to assimilate and learn how to destroy their common enemy.

Living outside the camp was like being born again. For one thing, food was readily available. Not that there was a lot of it, but anyone could go into the "dining room" of the cave and help themselves to canned food and fresh fruit. To people who had been literally starving a few days earlier, this was truly a remarkable gift. One day, Hershel saw an orange resting atop a cabinet in the dining room. He was simply walking through the room between regular meals. *That orange looks so good. And I am so hungry!* Impulsively, Hershel grasped the orange, looked around to be sure that he was not seen, and walked away. As he left the room, he noticed Cecil entering and pushed the orange quickly into his trousers pocket.

Cecil stopped and grabbed Hershel by the arm. Scowling at Hershel, Cecil growled, "Why are you hiding that orange?" Hershel's heart began to pound in fear. *I have taken food without permission. Dear God, people are shot for such things! They will punish me!* Suddenly, Cecil's scowl turned into a grin. He had been kidding. "You may take anything you want here, you know."

Hershel felt instantaneous relief. *He was joking with me!* To Hershel, those were the most wonderful words he had heard in two years. He sheepishly pulled the orange out of his pocket. While he was doing that, Cecil grabbed an apple and stuffed it into Hershel's other pocket. They smiled at each other as Hershel walked away. *Perhaps I have a new friend, as well.*

Chrusciel had created a well-coordinated group of freedom fighters. Everyone had a job. Some jobs were dull and ordinary, such as cooking, cleaning and mending clothes. Others required some skill at diplomacy, such as obtaining provisions, medical supplies and various sundries. In fact, most of the partisans were not actually fighters. Only a few select individuals were charged with the responsibility for fighting. The rest of the partisans supported the fighters. But, Chrusciel made everyone feel as though their job was just as vital to the group's

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success as those who carried guns and explosives, or those who cut the throats of the Nazi enemy. They were all soldiers to Chrusciel and everyone felt that way about themselves.

The cave was reminiscent of a large office building, somehow displaced into the wilderness. Everyone moved with a purpose. Meetings were frequent and always well attended. Like a bustling beehive, every member had a purpose and duties. The system functioned with efficiency and quality. Jacob and the other escaped prisoners gladly blended in with the partisans. They each gained a large measure of respect for their leader. They were proud to call themselves part of "Chrusciel's Army."

Unfortunately, for Jacob, communications with Theresienstadt had closed completely. The barracks that had been used for escape was demolished, with those few remaining prisoners sent to other locations. The few prisoners who had communicated with the partisans had escaped. So, there was no way for Jacob to know if his parents were well. He had been deeply concerned about his mother's condition when they left. His father seemed to hedge about it with him. That was a bad sign. At one point he told Jacob that she had typhus. Another time, he said it was malaria. Perhaps it was both. Jacob was frightened for them. He was also angry that he could not help them. Each evening, as he lay in the cave trying to sleep, he thought about his parents. He prayed for their health and well being. *Dear God, help me to find a way to save my beloved parents. I will learn whatever I must learn. I will endure that which I must. Only, please give me an opportunity to save them.* Alone, trembling, Jacob cried into the darkness. Inside, his mind was screaming. *I must save them! I must save them! I must save them!*

As the weeks passed by, Jacob and his comrades were taught how to use explosives and learned how to fight hand-to-hand. Everyone, including Rachael, learned how to kill someone by breaking their neck. They learned how to use a knife and where to reach major arteries. They learned how to assemble, clean and use various firearms. They tended to their chores each day and attended Council meetings. Finally, as the warm summer days were getting shorter again, it was time to prepare for their next operation.

Chapter 28

The First Mission

On the evening of August 21st, Jacob and Rachael walked hand-in-hand into the Council chambers. It was a “room” not far inside the cave, but with plenty of privacy. Slowly, the rest of the leadership group arrived. Jacob was deeply excited about the operation. It was a chance to hit back at the Nazis, as well as to get a close look at the camp.

Rachael’s hands were cold again and there was a knot in her stomach. She was afraid of the mission, but she could not explain why. Not prone to superstition or premonitions, she was surprised at her anxiety. She fought the wicked thoughts about their new mission. She had recently become obsessed with these fearful images. When she spoke of it to Jacob, he laughed and told her it was just a bad dream. Or, he suggested, it could simply be because she was pregnant. After all, he insisted, pregnancy changes a woman’s blood chemistry. It could be natural to have such fears. Yet, the alarming descriptions continued to come back. Rachael’s mind was spinning with anxiety. *Is something bad going to happen? Dear God, I can feel it in my bones. But, I cannot tell Jacob to stay out of the fight. He believes in his destiny and I cannot prevent it from happening. Besides, would he really avoid the mission because I “had a bad feeling?” He does not have much respect for my intuition.*

Something deep inside told Rachael to be cautious with the topic. She was very apprehensive that Jacob would be injured or even killed on this mission. As they waited for the Council members to arrive, Rachael drew close to Jacob and whispered in his ear quietly. “You don’t have to go out with this group, Jacob. It’s the first mission for you. Can you just stay back with the main group?”

Jacob looked at Rachael with surprise. “Why would I want to do that, Rachael? I’m a leader here. It is my responsibility to be a leader during an operation. What’s wrong?”

Rachael was again fighting tears. However, this time they were not tears of joy, but of fear. “Jacob, I don’t know what’s wrong. Something inside tells me to stop you. It says that something bad will happen. You should not go with them. Something is going to...”

Rachael stopped talking as people nearby began to stare at her. Finally, she moved close to Jacob and again whispered in his ear. “I’m afraid for you Jacob. I’m afraid something is going to happen to you.” As she pulled back to look at Jacob’s face, tears welled up in her eyes and spilled down across her face and lips. She quickly wiped them away as Jacob put his arm around her.

Chrusciel strode into the room, confident and smiling. “Is everyone here?” he asked. His words echoed across the cave from one end to the other. It was an eerie feeling. Rachael shuddered when she heard the echoes. Anton waited for a moment and then began. “As all of you are aware, our operation to destroy the

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railroad tracks near the Theresienstadt camp draws near. This will be our final meeting before the action. Walter, what have you discovered about our location?"

Walter, who rarely spoke unless necessary, brought some papers out of an old battered briefcase. He was a government planner in Dusseldorf before the Nazis forced him out of a job that he had held for more than twenty-five years. His skills were now very beneficial to the partisans. Walter and his wife were sent by train to Mauthausen. They were forced to work in a factory making shells for tanks. After six months, they were again forced into a train and were sent to Dachau. When they left the train, they were forced into two lines, one for men and the other for women and small children. That was the last time that Walter saw his wife and his ten-year-old daughter.

Walter unfolded some maps and cleared his throat. In his deep, baritone voice, he began. "There are two good target locations for the explosives. One is east of the camp, where the Germans have been digging that trench. The other is southwest of the camp. In both cases, the tracks make a sharp curve before going straight again. There is good protection from trees and bushes at both locations. Both locations are also near the bottom of a hill, so if we are pursued, the Germans will need to climb up to get us." Walter paused for a moment and allowed Chrusciel and the others to examine his maps. One of the maps was an official German Army map. It was highly detailed and professionally printed. The official German Army stamp, with its wide gray eagle wings, was on the map. The other two maps were carefully hand drawn, probably by Walter himself.

Jacob examined the maps carefully. He felt strange looking at maps of the area surrounding Theresienstadt. He had been inside of the camp for so long that he thought it strange to examine it from the outside. Jacob was concerned about the first location. If the Germans had been digging trenches to cover the bodies of those they had killed, they might come back. The ground there was also not very solid, due to the trench. Therefore, the second location looked better to Jacob.

While Jacob was carefully examining the maps, Chrusciel was looking at him intently. Rachael noticed this but said nothing. Then, abruptly, Chrusciel said, "Jacob, where do you think we should attack?" Jacob did not anticipate this and was taken aback for a moment. Clearly, Chrusciel was offering Jacob leadership credentials. Perhaps it was only because Jacob had recently escaped from the camp and was the leader of his group. But, Jacob felt that Chrusciel had indeed been giving him a great deal of credit for leadership ability. It felt good to Jacob. *This is my destiny! I must become the leader that destiny demands – strong, powerful and with devoted followers!* He enjoyed the recognition. He also felt something deep inside urging him on as a leader. Since his terrifying nightmare, Jacob had felt the leader growing within his mind. Now, it was time to turn the dream into reality. The feeling had bothered him for so long, like a splinter in his brain. He could not escape from it any more than he could change the color of his eyes. Some important destiny was pushing him onward, day after day. If Jacob had been a fatalist, he would have called it providence. Now, he called it God's expectation of him. Before the war, Jacob believed that only each

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person's decisions and actions created his destiny. Now, Jacob could not turn away from the inner urging. Leading partisans into battle felt like destiny to Jacob right now. *It could be the only way to save my parents!*

Jacob looked up at Chrusciel. Their eyes met and locked for a moment. Then, Jacob began in a soft but firm voice. "The second site is much better. We should attack from the southwest of the camp. If the Germans are forced to dig up the bodies of those they killed, they may come back. Also, the ground there is uneven and soft. The trench that we fell into when we escaped could have been filled with water. So, the only high ground for us to use is next to the forest. It's not close enough to the tracks. On the other hand, the second site is perfect. There are several mounds above the tracks that we could use for machine gun emplacements. Below, the track curves tightly so that the engineer could not possibly see us in time to stop the train. That pretty much insures a derailment. On top of that, there is a very large hill above the tracks there. If we can bait the Germans into attacking us, they will have to climb all the way up that hill to reach us. Our machine guns would wipe them out." As Jacob paused for a moment, he noticed everyone's eyes were directly on him. He had the rapt attention of everyone in the room, as though he were some famous general, planning to annihilate the German armed forces. Of course it was not true. Still, it felt appropriate in his heart. *Yes, this is my destiny. God, please grant me the strength and wisdom to be a good and effective leader.*

Chrusciel interrupted during the pause. "Jacob, you are absolutely correct. The second site is perfect for us. When and where did you learn these battlefield tactics?" Jacob was taken aback. He thought at first that Chrusciel was making fun of him. But, as he looked into Chrusciel's eyes, he saw that the question was meant as a compliment. After a long, uncomfortable silence, Jacob replied, "Well, I played a lot of chess when I was in school." Everyone laughed at Jacob's remark. There was no tension in the room. *What else could I say? I have no experience or training! I can only say what feels correct.* Chrusciel apparently meant his compliment about tactical warfare skills. Jacob smiled while Rachael gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Chrusciel cleared his throat and continued. "Maurice, what do you have to offer us in the way of train schedules?"

Maurice was a small man, short and thin with a pudgy face. He was from a small village in France called Bron. Maurice was a professor of history at The University of Lyon. He was in his thirties and had never married. Apparently, someone told the Germans that Maurice was a homosexual. One day, as he was leaving to teach at the university, a small convoy of German soldiers grabbed him and took him to a local prison. Although Maurice vehemently denied that he was a homosexual, the German prison authority branded him as such "because of his size" and sent him to a forced labor camp near Dresden. He was later sent to a forced labor camp "in the east," but he escaped from the train and wandered the forests until the partisans discovered him. Maurice cleared his throat and began in a strained, high-pitched voice. "I have obtained official German train schedules and routings for the period August 15th through September 15th." He unfolded a stack of official papers and maps. They were each stamped by the

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official German High Command, meaning each directive for each train was approved by the highest authority possible.

The entire group, including Jacob and Chrusciel simply stared at Maurice for a very long time. No one spoke. Everyone was astounded. How could an escaped professor obtain such highly classified documents? Finally, Chrusciel interrupted the silence. "Maurice, these are original documents! How could you obtain them? Only officers with the rank of Major or above have access to such timetables. How did you do this?"

Maurice paused for a moment, and then slowly answered in his squeaky voice. "I discovered that one of my cousins is an officer with the German High Command. I once saved his life when he fell unconscious into a lake, when we were young. You might say that he owed me a rather large favor." Someone began to clap their hands. Others joined in and soon, everyone on the Council was applauding. Maurice smiled broadly and bowed as his face turned red.

The group laughed and chuckled, except for Chrusciel, who interjected, "But how could you sneak something like this out of headquarters? It must have been kept in a safe or under guard." Maurice shrugged his balding head. "Anton, all I can tell you is that he found it and he found a way to get it out. He told me later that he would be hanged on the spot if anyone discovered it was him. He also said that no one in the Ministry would ever have the nerve to disclose this theft, since the embarrassment would ruin their military career. Whoever was in charge would simply replace the original with a copy, or make a new copy, rather than risk humiliation." He glanced up at Anton with a fearful smile. Chrusciel stared into Maurice's eyes. Something felt wrong. Yet, he did not wish to confront Maurice because he had a bad feeling.

Chrusciel picked up the papers and gazed at them for a long time. He was not smiling. In fact, he seemed to be deep in thought. *Something is not right here. How could something so important be smuggled out of German Army headquarters? No officer in his right mind would risk his career over something like this. It does not seem possible! Can I trust Maurice? He has never done anything suspicious before. Perhaps I am too suspicious.* He gazed down at the official, stamped documents for a moment longer.

Finally, he said, "we must share this with the partisans in France, Germany and Poland. They will be able to hurt the German war machine all over Europe with this." Then, Chrusciel looked at Maurice and gave him a very broad smile. "Maurice, this will be remembered for years and years. You have given us, as well as other partisans, a fighting chance. On behalf of partisans and fighters all over Europe, I thank you for your ingenious and dangerous work." Chrusciel bowed deeply towards Maurice, whose cheeks had changed color to a bright red. Everyone in the cave again burst into applause for Maurice. They then chanted his name for several minutes.

Jacob did not smile, applaud or chant Maurice's name. He was deep in thought. He too, was suspicious. However, it would be inappropriate to say something about it. *Something is wrong about this! It does not seem possible that such important papers could have been stolen.* Jacob was deeply disturbed about Maurice, but he was reluctant to bring it up with Chrusciel. After all, it was

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just a feeling. But, that feeling ran deep and strong in Jacob's mind. *There is something about Maurice and his story that does not add up! Yet, I dare not say this to Chrusciel.* Instead, he observed as Chrusciel continued with the meeting.

"Now, let's see what you've got here Maurice," exclaimed Chrusciel. The Council examined the schedules and timetables for several minutes. Finally, Chrusciel looked at Maurice seriously. "Maurice, you have had a chance to look these over for some time. What do you think? What might be our best target?"

Maurice leafed through the papers for a few moments until he found what he was looking for. "Here it is. I found this to be very interesting." Maurice pointed at the timetable for August 25th. "Here, look at this. Every Thursday, there is a train carrying tanks – big ones too, Panzers. They post only about twenty troops to guard the train. After all, what could happen to military trains in areas they already control?" Maurice smiled broadly after saying this, exposing several missing teeth in front. Jacob wondered if those teeth were knocked out during interrogation in prison. "They also carry a lot of munitions on each military transport train. Most of the other days, the Germans send large numbers of troops on these routes. I think we would be in for more than we bargained for if we hit a troop train. There aren't enough of us here to fight off such large numbers of German troops. But the tanks and munitions would be a great prize, don't you think?"

Maurice looked up at Chrusciel with wide eyes and a huge grin. Chrusciel looked down approvingly. "Maurice, I could not agree with you more." Chrusciel then handed the group the timetable page for August 25th. "There is a transport leaving Prague at 1:30 on the 25th. It should arrive at our location around 2:30. What do you say we steal some nice new Panzers from the Krauts?" The Council erupted in applause and several spirited conversations ensued.

The Council spent the next two hours arguing over machine gun placements, the precise spot on the tracks for explosives and a very detailed plan of attack. First, they would destroy the tracks just in front of the train. Then, they would fire at some of the emerging Germans, in an effort to entice them into a firefight up the steep hillside, where partisan machine guns would wipe them out. It looked like a flawless plan. Success was guaranteed.

At one point, Jacob asked about their policy towards prisoners. Everyone stopped talking and stared at Jacob. Chrusciel responded with a firm voice. "Jacob, we almost never take prisoners. However, when we do, we interrogate them. German prisoners sometimes give us very valuable information. Jacob, you must understand that the Germans have every advantage. They have more and better trained fighters, with much better equipment and weapons. They have submarines, bombers, fighters, destroyers, tanks and artillery. In every way, they are superior. We must take advantage of any opportunity to learn about their plans. So, once in a while, we take a prisoner. But, you must understand that we cannot keep them. We simply do not have the manpower or resources to guard and maintain prisoners here. And, if we let them go, they will go back and tell the Germans how to capture, or kill all of us here." Jacob realized that they had no other choice. He could see that the partisans had to kill their prisoners. Still, the thought did not rest easily with his concept of ethics. *After all, this is war. And,*

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in war people must to do ugly things.

Finally, the Council disbanded. As the group left the cave, Chrusciel pulled Maurice to his side and gave him a warm hug. "Nice going my friend," whispered Chrusciel to Maurice. As Jacob and Rachael were leaving, Chrusciel stopped them. Looking Jacob in the eyes, he said, "Are you two really ready for this? I mean are you physically and mentally ready? This will be the first time that you will be in combat. You've had little time to learn and prepare. If you prefer to watch us from the top of the hill, no one would say anything about it. We do not question your courage."

Then he looked at Rachael and smiled. "You are carrying a child. Combat is no place for a pregnant woman."

Rachael looked into Jacob's eyes and quickly responded to Chrusciel. "I go where my husband goes. I go with him willingly, even into combat. There is no place that I would not go with Jacob."

Rachael's bravery impressed Chrusciel. But her devotion to Jacob caused him to frown. Chrusciel thought about this for a moment. "You are both certain about this? I would feel terrible if either of you were killed or wounded." Rachael and Jacob nodded in the affirmative and Chrusciel walked away.

Jacob, who had been silent, stopped him. "Anton, we thank you for rescuing us from the forest and for allowing us to join your partisans. But we are no longer civilians. We do not have the luxury of waiting out the end of the war on the sidelines. The Germans have stolen our homes, our jobs, our education and all of our money. They have ruined our lives and now they are building horrible camps to kill millions of innocent people, mostly Jews. My own parents are still at risk in the camp so near to our cave. No, Anton, we are now soldiers. And, yes, even pregnant women can fight the evil that seeks to destroy us. If we can fight, we must fight. We must continue on until death or freedom for all of our people. Our lives and the continuation of our religion are at stake. Anton, we must fight."

As he paused, Jacob thought again about his distrust of Maurice. *Should I say something about Maurice? Would it be appropriate for me to inform our leader of my suspicion?* Chrusciel smiled and turned to walk away again. Jacob opened his mouth to speak and then stopped. *Who am I to tell a leader such as Anton about the safety and security of his council members? I am new here and know nothing.*

Chrusciel watched from the shadows as Jacob and Rachael walked hand in hand out of the cave and into the bright light beyond. He said nothing to Jacob, but his reservations about Maurice had developed into a bad feeling about the coming battle. *There is something about Maurice that I do not trust. I have a bad feeling about this operation.*

Chrusciel also was bothered by his growing desire for Rachael. From the moment he saw her, he had become infatuated. He thought that she was by far the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen. *So what if she is a Jew!* He was smitten with her and within a few days everyone could see it in his eyes and his behavior. Each day, his passion for her grew in intensity. As he continued to observe from the shadows, he wondered if something bad might happen to Jacob.

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He shuddered. *That's not the way I want to win her over.*

Rachael and Jacob had two days to wait before executing their first “operation” with the partisans. Facing possible death, they wanted to be together all of the time. “It’s like going from the worst torment to the most exquisite paradise,” whispered Jacob. Nothing could match this ephemeral joy as they wrapped themselves with each other and held on for dear life. During this time, Rachael was delighted to discover that Jacob still loved her body. She was, after all almost six months pregnant. Her breasts were enlarged and tender. She was afraid that Jacob would find her distended abdomen ugly or perhaps even revolting. But, from the moment they were reunited, Jacob was tender and loving, as he had always been. Rachael was delighted with his eagerness and lack of anxiety with her physical condition. If possible, it seemed that Jacob loved her more now than when she was not pregnant.

Jacob, for his part, adored all of Rachael’s body. He had been trapped away from her for much of the past two years, even after they were married. He did not care how her body cells were currently arranged. Jacob felt only a pure and simple joy when he was with her. He was enthralled to be with the woman that he adored and his greatest feeling was to make her feel good. In lovemaking, he was gentle and persistent. He felt fortunate that his soul mate continued to love him. Considering the dread that enveloped them, making love now offered a sense of urgency and devotion. And most importantly, Jacob felt joy that a new life had been created as a consequence of their love. This new life held a special meaning for Jacob. He felt joy in the most primal way, fulfilled that true love had resulted in a new life. The thought of being a father had suddenly given Jacob’s life a new harmony. Albeit temporary, he was happier than he had ever been.

On the morning of August 25, 1942, the peace and harmony of Jacob’s brief respite was gone. Jacob and Rachael wore the clothes that they had been given for “operations.” In both cases they looked like farmers clothes – on the outside. The plain, brown shirts, grey slacks and thin overcoats had a multitude of hidden pockets, enabling them to carry knives, grenades, dynamite, hand guns and, in some cases, machine guns – without appearing unusual. Seen from a distance, they would appear to be harmless farmers. Up close, they were a well-armed band of trained terrorists.

At noon, the Council met for the last time before the operation. However, since it was the day of the operation, the “field officers” were included. Everyone on the team understood the orders and consequences of all potential actions. Chrusciel began the meeting. Jacob’s heart was pounding. Rachael was next to him. Her hands were cold and trembling. The partisans prepared them for what they were about to do. But realistically, it was impossible to become a trained fighter in a few weeks. They were over-age school children, given dangerous tools that they did not fully understand, to accomplish a military objective for which they had not been fully trained. Their enemy intelligence was based more on rumor than fact. Privately, Jacob wondered if they would crack under pressure.

“All right,” Chrusciel began. Let’s work this through one more time so that everyone will know how to carry out his or her portion of the operation.”

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Ten partisans were assigned by the Council to destroy the rail line. Chrusciel selected Leon, Joseph and Albert for their military training, experience on other missions and because they had nerves of steel. Jacob selected himself, Hershel, Solomon and Hershel's cousin Rebecca. Each had at least some training with firearms. Jacob asked Rachael to stay behind. However, one very nasty glance from Rachael told him that it would be impossible to convince her to stay at the cave. At least she agreed to stay near the top of the hill overlooking the tracks!

Leon would travel ahead of the group as a scout. If he found the site unsuitable in terms of safety, he would report back to the main group and the mission would be aborted. Otherwise, he would secure the site, tear up bushes and branches to cover the dynamite wires and wait for the group to arrive. Jacob would assist Albert in planting the dynamite and running the electrical line out to a hidden location nearby for detonation. The rest of the group would hide behind trees in the hills above, using bushes, branches and rocks for strategic firing positions. If all worked well, they would have the Germans in a crossfire.

Once the train had been derailed, the entire group would fire upon Germans emerging from the wreck. Upon conclusion of the operation, the group would salvage whatever they could from the train – hopefully weapons and possibly even tanks. The group had gone through these instructions time after time. Each participant was so familiar with the mission that he could have described it in his sleep. Jacob was filled with apprehension, but also very excited about his first opportunity to fight the Germans.

The group of ten loaded themselves with weapons and the dynamite. Everyone in the cave was now wishing them luck. They offered supportive messages and congratulations in advance. Each member of the group had at least one rifle, one handgun, several grenades (German), knives and strong wire (to choke someone, if necessary). As they left the cave, Jacob had a strange feeling. *Something is wrong. I am not afraid, but I cannot shake the feeling that something bad is about to happen. If I say something about it, they will think me a coward.* He had never before positioned himself as a fighter. Fighting went against his nature. But after losing his home, after losing his plans for college, and now with his parents still imprisoned – Jacob was more than ready to fight.

The group began the downhill trek of more than two kilometers at one o'clock. The day was, as anticipated, hot and dry. Fluffy cumulous clouds crawled underneath a deep blue sky. A steady wind blew from the south. Jacob feared the wind getting in the way of communication. *If it increases much in strength, oral communication may become difficult.* Nevertheless, everyone in the group was trained in combat hand signals. The group walked into the dense forest behind the cave.

At almost exactly 2:00, the group reached the far edge of the forest, almost exactly where Jacob and the others had escaped. In fact, Jacob could see where the Germans had completely covered the trench filled with corpses. He wondered aloud if the bodies were still underground.

"Not a chance," replied Chrusciel. "If the Germans opened that trench, it was to remove the bodies."

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“Why?” asked Rachael. Chrusciel offered a wry smile in her direction.

“My dear, if the Germans opened the trench, it was to remove evidence of mass executions. We know that the Red Cross was here a few weeks ago and found nothing amiss. But, as soon as we heard about you falling into that trench, we posted the Red Cross with information about the genocide.”

Jacob paused for a moment. To the best of his recollection, that was the first time that anyone nearby had used the word “genocide.” Yet, that is what the Germans were doing. Jacob suddenly was overwhelmed with fear. “What if the rest of the world doesn’t know about the German plan to wipe out European Jews? What if we tell them, but they don’t believe us?” It was maddening. “What if we tell the world, but they don’t care enough to stop it?”

Chrusciel put his hand on Jacob’s shoulder. “That, my friend is why we fight. You see, we cannot count on help from anyone. The English and Russians are not winning the war. The Americans are more concerned with defeating the Japanese. Even with the Americans fighting for the Allies in Europe, do not expect them to free your people imprisoned in forced labor or death camps. They will always select military targets first. So, you see Jacob, we are on our own.” Jacob’s heart sank as he saw the truth and logic in Chrusciel’s statement. *Anton truly understands the situation. It is no wonder that so many partisans are so loyal to him.* Despite his age, older partisans respected Chrusciel. He was a born leader. *I, however, am only a leader in training.*

The daylight had grown noticeably darker throughout the partisans’ trek in the forest. By the time they emerged at the edge of the forest for their final walk to the railroad tracks, dark gray rain clouds were pushing in from the southwest. The wind had also become much more brisk, with gusts stirring up clouds of dust and sand. Chrusciel gazed at the dark clouds, looked at his watch and frowned. He looked at Jacob and the others, then back at his watch again. Jacob could see that Chrusciel’s mind was working feverishly. Then, he looked again at Jacob.

“We have eighteen minutes to reach our target location and set the charges,” said Chrusciel in a firm voice. “We planned this operation for calm, dry weather. This does not mean that we cannot achieve our objective if it rains, but we will have to be very careful with the dynamite and the detonators.” Chrusciel then lowered his voice somewhat and said, “If we end up in a firefight with the Germans, and we have to climb up steep wet hillsides, we’ll be in trouble. If any of us were to fall back down the hill, they would roll right into the Germans.” Chrusciel looked hard at Jacob, Rachael and Hershel. It seemed to Jacob that Chrusciel now regretted taking along the newest and most untrained partisans. “Again, if you slip on wet grass or mud and fall down the hillside during a firefight, you will be rolling right towards the Germans. They will either kill you on the spot, or take you prisoner. We will likely be significantly outnumbered. If you fall, we will not be able to help you. I’m asking each of you right now to give this new weather situation some deep thought. So, tell me now if you wish to proceed or to come back here another time.”

Jacob looked at Rachael first. She showed no emotion at all. She seemed reluctant to go along with the mission, but said nothing. He then looked at Hershel, who gave him a “thumb’s up” signal. Jacob was so eager to join with the parti-

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sans and to hit back at the Germans that his mind was blinded to the risk. Had Jacob known what it would be like to try to climb wet grass on a very steep incline, with Germans firing machine guns, he would have asked to turn back. If Jacob had known the incredibly terrifying feeling of falling down the ravine into the hands of the Germans, he would have asked to return to the cave. Instead, Jacob allowed his emotions to overcome logic. They could have come back any day, when there would be no threat of rain. It would have been logical. But Jacob felt such an enormous need to punish the Germans for everything they had done to him and his family, that logic was pushed aside. He looked at Chrusciel and in a very firm voice said, "We have a chance today to derail a train carrying panzers and a lot of ammunition. Think about how this can help the Allies, even if it only delays their arrival at the front. Besides, it might not even rain, so, let's go." Jacob applied a tough expression, but was a bundle of nerves inside. He looked quickly at Rachael. She sensed his tension and put her arm around him. Chrusciel observed this with a wry smile.

With just over fifteen minutes to spare, Chrusciel led the partisans out of the forest and across the hillside just south of Theresienstadt. They quickly found the railroad tracks and followed them around the south side of the camp, moving towards the west. As they walked to the top of the ravine they could feel the wind increasing in strength. In the distance, they heard the sound of thunder. However, the sounds of artillery or air bombardment were easily mistaken for thunder. The humid air suddenly felt cold and less dense, while dark clouds raced across the sky towards them. Jacob believed that rain was imminent. Still, they required only about five minutes to set the charges and move back for detonation. *It is enough time to set the dynamite.* Jacob felt that they could do it.

Chrusciel also felt that they had time before the rain started to set the charges. However, his main concern was protecting anyone who might accidentally fall down into the ravine. He reminded them that if someone were to fall back down towards the bottom, they would likely not be rescued. They would be killed or taken prisoner.

The group reached the top of the ravine with nine minutes to spare. Walter, who was responsible for transporting the dynamite, gave his backpack to Jacob. Jacob was surprised to discover how heavy it was. Walter had selected almost forty pounds of high-grade dynamite for this job. It was certainly more than enough to rip the tracks apart. Hershel, who separately carried the detonators, now gave them to Chrusciel.

Jacob stood with Anton at the top of the ravine. His heart was pounding. *The time for heroes has finally arrived. God, please grant me the strength to complete this important task.* As he extended his hand to Hershel, he found it was trembling. So, instead of shaking hands, Jacob quickly embraced Hershel. Surprisingly, Hershel was very nervous. Jacob also saw a tear in Hershel's eye. "Be very careful my good friend," croaked Hershel in a shaky voice.

Jacob turned to Rachael. She put her hands around his face. They were cold. Tears now streamed down Rachael's face. "Oh, my love, what are you doing? You should be watching these others before doing this yourself. I could not bear it if something happened to you." Rachael was now sobbing. "Please,

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please, oh Jacob, don't get hurt." She could no longer speak, so she wrapped her arms around Jacob and held him as tight as possible. Jacob pushed himself away and started walking down into the ravine. For a moment, he looked back at Rachael and did his best to give her a warm smile. He did not know what that smile might have looked like, but he guessed that it was not nearly as confident as he would have liked it to be. *A love like this is ever so rare. Rachael, I will love you forever.* Jacob tried to deliver a confident glance to Rachael as he turned back to face his destiny.

Jacob carried the dynamite down the ravine, while Chrusciel carried the detonators. As Jacob walked, he recalled that one of the first things he had learned about being a partisan fighter was to never, ever, carry dynamite with detonators together. It could easily be catastrophic if a detonator exploded close to the dynamite. They were to remain separate until it was time to plant the charges. *That time was now!* As Jacob walked carefully down the embankment, his mind was spinning. He very much wanted to look up to observe the black clouds scudding across the sky, but he could not take a chance of falling on the rocks or from the steep incline. So, he kept his head down. His mind was a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. *I must do this right.* It was to be his first step towards stopping the Germans and freeing his parents. Within two minutes, the two had reached the bottom. They walked directly to their target – the tracks on the far side of the ravine. Chrusciel and Jacob quickly began to assess the location.

"Where should we plant the charges?" asked Jacob. Chrusciel gazed up and down the tracks for about thirty seconds, frowning at times. Finally, he walked to a small grove of bushes on the right side of the tracks. He pulled some of the bushes out of the ground. He then took out his knife and cut several more bushes out of the ground.

"We'll plant the charges right here," Chrusciel said, pointing to the grove on the right side of the tracks. He continued, "We'll also place these branches over our wires on the other side. Then, we'll climb back up to that large rock on the right side of the embankment. We'll run the wires up there and set off the explosion from behind the rock. It will protect us from the debris." Jacob found the plan to be perfect. The train's engineer will not see the wires at all, or if he does, he will be far too close to stop the train in time. It was perfect. "Put rocks on top of the bushes so that they won't fly away," shouted Chrusciel.

Chrusciel had to shout at Jacob because the wind had now become loud. Claps of thunder also became regular and increased in intensity. Jacob took a quick look above and saw that the sky had become exceedingly dark. He also realized that the temperature had dropped several degrees in just a few minutes. He could now see lightning strikes against the ever-darkening sky. They had perhaps two or three minutes before the rain would arrive.

"Come on," Chrusciel shouted. Jacob ran to Chrusciel and helped to unpack the dynamite. He saw that Walter had prepared three stacks of dynamite together. Each stack included ten individual sticks of dynamite. Jacob was, again, stunned by the power that this small backpack carried. The explosion would be huge. Jacob wrapped the dynamite together and waited for Chrusciel to give him the detonators. Together, Chrusciel and Jacob placed the detonators

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carefully into the dynamite. Despite the fact that the temperature had dropped, Jacob found himself sweating profusely. His heart was pounding with fear.

Just as the last detonator was in place, above the roaring wind, Jacob heard a train whistle. His heart skipped a beat and jumped into his throat. He stopped and looked up at the ravine. Lightning suddenly lit up the trees and leaves brightly, casting a huge white shadow against the darkness of the forest. The lightning was so bright that Jacob could see each member of the partisans hiding next to rocks and trees. It was a surreal image that burned its way into Jacob's mind. He began to feel very, very uneasy. *Something is wrong. Something bad is about to happen.* Suddenly, he felt a sharp push from behind. He turned to find Chrusciel glaring at him, hand outthrust. "Focus, Jacob!" Chrusciel screamed, above the shrieking wind. "We need to plant the dynamite under the tracks. Do you hear me?"

Jacob felt that time had suddenly slowed down. He swayed on his knees. Chrusciel put his arms out to catch Jacob, but he was able to regain his balance. The roar of the wind and Chrusciel's shouts seemed to fall into the background, dimmed like the fading light. Jacob struggled mightily to focus on reality. Nearby, tree branches were bending with the weight of the wind, their leaves turning upside down. He had no idea why he suddenly felt as though he was drunk. His reactions were sluggish. He felt like an observer as his hands pushed the bundle of dynamite underneath the tracks. He then watched as his fingers moved the wires coming out from the dynamite. He was performing acts rehearsed extensively in preparation for the mission, but he also felt as though he was someplace else, watching as his body performed those repetitious movements. The feeling that he was detached from his actions was frightening.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning exploded directly above them. Jacob heard it first as a sizzle. The hairs on the back of his head stood straight up. Suddenly he felt a tremendous thud and he was pushed back by huge wash of warm air. Then, a prodigious clap of thunder deafened Jacob. In addition to hearing it, Jacob could *feel* it. It shook Jacob, the ground underneath him, and then reverberated throughout to the forest above. He had never been this close to lightning and it was a harrowing experience. He could smell the ozone in the air. Jacob looked at Chrusciel and saw that he was also stunned. Chrusciel's arms waved listlessly around him as he stared at the horizon.

The shriek of a train whistle much closer than it was before served as an alarm clock for Jacob and Chrusciel. They bolted into action. Jacob carried the wire from the dynamite across the tracks and up the ravine wall towards the large rock designated by Chrusciel as their target location. Below, Chrusciel covered the wire with pieces of the branches that he had cut from bushes. Within seconds, both partisans had climbed back up into the side of the ravine and were crouched together behind a huge rock. They carefully connected the wires to the detonator and primed it.

The train's whistle blew again, and this time it sounded very close. Jacob surveyed the area with binoculars. With the wires covered, it took a moment to locate the dynamite. As Jacob looked down at the dynamite, he saw with dismay that it was visible above the branches torn down to hide it. The wind had blown

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away the bushes covering it. He then looked for the train through binoculars, although he was unable to see it. It was still behind the curve. He looked back down at the dynamite. As he looked closer, he noticed that one of the wires to the dynamite had become disconnected. It was now waiving above the dynamite in the raging wind. What's wrong?" Chrusciel shouted. Jacob could barely hear him. He was still somewhat deafened from the great thunderclap just above him, as well as the now-raging roar of the wind. Jacob handed Chrusciel the binoculars and shouted as loud as he could. "I have to fix it," he shouted and then fled down the ravine edge into the bottom, along the bushes.

Jacob's heart was pounding as he stumbled down the hill to repair the wire. The train's whistle shrieked again and this time he knew that it was painfully near. Thunder again broke its deafening sound upon the ravine, reverberating around Jacob's ears. Nothing mattered to Jacob now, except reaching the dynamite and pushing the wire back in. Nothing held superiority over completing the mission. The rain was now torrential; coming in waves so thick that visibility was difficult. As he neared the bottom, Jacob slipped on a wet stone and fell hard to his left. Severe pain seared through his left knee. *Something is seriously wrong. I have never had that much pain in my knee before!* As he tried to get up, the knee buckled underneath him and he fell to the gravel below. *Oh God, the pain is unbearable! But I still have a job to do. I will not fail the partisans on my first mission. I swear to God that I will finish the mission.*

From behind a tree at the top of the ravine, Rachael watched as her husband fell in obvious pain. She screamed his name, but her voice was lost in the roaring storm. *Oh dear God, help Jacob. Someone please help him! Oh, God, please let Jacob get up and walk.* She watched in agony as Jacob continued to writhe in pain on the floor of the ravine. Suddenly, something caught her eye to the right. It was the train. Now she stood up and screamed at the top of her lungs. "Jacob, get up! Jacob, the train is almost there!" Rachael screamed as her heart raced. But it was of no use. Even the train's loud whistle was now obscured by the torrential storm. It was the most helpless feeling that Rachael had ever experienced.

Jacob was unable to stand and walk, but he dragged himself to his feet pushing as far as he could with his left arm. He thus avoided placing weight on his left knee. He hopped on one leg across the tracks to the dynamite and fell upon it. The searing pain in his left knee was horrible. But, from here he could fix the problem quickly. Jacob gently placed the detonator wire back into the dynamite. He then placed the broken branches on top of it and put a rock on top of the branches. When he felt certain that no one could detect the dynamite visually, he turned to go back up the hill to the rock, where Chrusciel was anxiously waiting.

When he looked up, he saw Chrusciel anxiously waving his arms in Jacob's direction. He looked higher up the hillside and saw other partisans also waving their arms at Jacob. Some of them were pointing towards the east. Looking at the top of the hillside, he saw Rachael. She seemed to be screaming and, with her arms waving frantically, she looked wild-eyed. But, Jacob could hear nothing above the torrent of the storm. *Why are the partisans screaming and waving at*

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me? Jacob was puzzled. He had lost track of time. Suddenly, it came to him. *Oh, my God. The train! The train must be coming!*

When he attempted to get to his feet, Jacob's left knee again buckled and he fell back to the ground, next to the dynamite. He forced himself up, balancing on his right leg. As Jacob hopped across the tracks, he fell again, this time directly across the tracks. The pain in his felt knee was unrelenting and horrible. He looked to his left, expecting to see smoke from the train over the next hill. Instead, what he saw shocked him. There, no more than 100 meters away, was the train! The locomotive was almost obscured by the intense rainfall. But there it was. And it was loaded with German soldiers. Not only was the train much closer than it should have been, it had almost come to a complete stop. None of this made sense to Jacob, as he lay across the tracks, stunned and unable to move. Why would the train stop here? They must... suddenly Jacob realized the truth. In an instant, the dull, black, horrible truth exploded in Jacob's mind. *Someone is a traitor! Someone told the Germans exactly where we would be and when we would be here. There could be no other reason.* His anger turned to fear as he realized that he was trapped.

As the horrific end of Jacob's first operation made its way through his mind he heard strange sounds revolving around him. For a moment, Jacob thought it was hail, from the storm. So, he looked up into the sky, but saw nothing but rain. Then something whistled through the air just above his head. *My God, it is bullets!* Suddenly, bullets were whistling all around him. Pieces of dirt and gravel were kicked up wherever bullets slammed into the ground. Then, he heard the pinging sound of bullets bouncing off of the rail and into nearby rocks. Some bullets entered the ground with a "thud." Suddenly, another bolt of pain exploded in Jacob's left leg, this time in his thigh. The jolt was so powerful that Jacob was pushed backwards. He fell upon his back heavily. Looking down, he saw that he had been shot in his left leg, above the knee. The pain was tremendous, but Jacob still tried to stand up. Continued whistles and zinging sounds affirmed that the Germans were still shooting at him. The shots were coming from the train. He looked up to see German soldiers on both sides of the slow-moving train, aiming directly at him. In the hills above, the partisans were pouring fire upon the train. He looked back down at his leg and saw that it was bleeding profusely. He tried to get up and collapsed. His left leg was now totally useless. The pain from it was overwhelming. He screamed, half from pain and half from anger. *This is not the way my first mission is supposed to end! Everything is wrong!* Most of Jacob's anger was directed at the traitor. *Who is it? It has to be someone on the Council. No one else knew about mission details until yesterday!*

Jacob sat across the tracks with bullets whizzing around him. *I hope that the bullets kill me! I have failed everyone! I have failed Rachael and my parents and I have failed my brothers and sisters in the partisans! God, please let them kill me!* A bullet hit just in front of him, pushing gravel into his face. Jacob was in anguish. *If just one bullet can hit the dynamite next to me, only tiny bits of my body would remain. The explosion would tear me apart. I deserve to die. I deserve to die.*

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He was drenched from the rain. His left leg was badly damaged and useless. He could not escape from the Germans or hurt them. He now resigned himself to death. His thoughts were first with Rachael, then with his parents. They would not see him again. He would never see his child. He could hear Rachael screaming at him from the top of the ravine. Jacob strained to listen as hard as he could, but he could not understand what she was saying above the roar of the wind and the tempest of warfare sounds. She had been right in asking him to pull out from this mission. Their lives could have continued as they were before. Now, their lips would never touch again. He would never see their child grow up. *So, this is how my life will end after all. I will not be forced to operate an oven in a death camp for the purpose of burning dead Jews. I will die here, on railroad tracks, less than a mile from my parents and only a few meters from my beloved wife.*

Suddenly, Jacob heard what he thought was another clap of thunder, but quickly realized that the partisans were throwing grenades at the arriving train. They exploded in front of Jacob, amid the thunder. He also saw small puffs of smoke rise from the side of the ravine. The partisans were firing their weapons at the Germans to take their attention away from Jacob. And, it worked. The Germans were now directing all of their fire at the side of the ravine.

Jacob pushed himself up as far as he could. From that position, he could see the train and the partisans' positions on the side of the ravine. He saw Chrusciel, who was closest to him, firing his machine gun from the large rock at the Germans. He watched as Chrusciel lobbed a grenade at the train. Jacob heard the explosion, but could not see the damage from his position.

Jacob was getting groggy and dizzy. And, he had begun to feel very cold. Still, he forced himself to stay upright in order to watch his comrades fight the Germans. *How brave these partisans are!* He was losing blood rapidly. The pain in his left leg was overwhelming. As the sounds of the battle diminished in Jacob's mind, he looked up into the sky. He was no longer able to focus on the mission. As darkness began to envelope his field of vision, Jacob noticed someone standing over him. He opened his eyes as far as he could and saw that it was a German soldier. In fact, it was an SS officer. Jacob saw the German officer pull his rifle up into the air. A moment later, he felt the rifle butt crash down across his forehead. Jacob then fell into an empty, cold darkness.

Chrusciel flinched as he observed the German officer crash his rifle butt into Jacob's skull. At least sixty German soldiers came out of the train, while several others swiftly set up a 50-caliber machine gun and began firing at the partisans' positions. The gun battle had now raged on for about ten minutes. Anton was furious. This was no train with tanks and only two dozen soldiers. There were hundreds of soldiers! It was a trap! He had been misled.

With great sadness, Chrusciel realized that it was now impossible to rescue Jacob. The mission was lost. He suddenly recalled his thoughts earlier about Jacob. In envy of Rachael's love for him, Chrusciel had wondered in an offhand manner if he would have a chance with her, should Jacob meet an untimely end. He shuddered after observing himself as a lecherous self-centered idiot. *Never think in such evil terms again!* Now that it had happened, he felt nagging guilt

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rise up within him.

Worse yet, he realized that one of his trusted comrades was a traitor. There is no other way that the Germans could know exactly where and when to find them. *I've a traitor in my midst!* He quickly searched for all possible military solutions. *We are armed comparably, but outgunned. We still have the dynamite, which Jacob re-connected. The only logical military option is to set off the dynamite. Our main objective would be accomplished. We would kill some soldiers, perhaps an officer or two. And, we would slow down their advance, if only for a few hours. This is our job. We cannot defeat them. Our goal is to slow them down. I said this so many times. But, we would blow him up with it, because he cannot get away.*

Chrusciel's mind swirled with possibilities. He was infuriated. *Even if we were to detonate the dynamite, the train is too far away to be damaged. Of course, the traitor told them to keep away from the dynamite! There could have been no other reason for the train to slow down and then stop before reaching the dynamite.* One of his trusted inner-circle partisans was working for the Nazis and that angered Chrusciel more than he could have ever imagined. With the mission lost, and no other way to damage the enemy, Chrusciel now had to order a retreat. *I cannot kill Jacob.* More than anything, he wanted to spare Rachael the pain. *Would you make the same decision if he were someone else?* With a loud whistle and hand signals, Chrusciel ordered his partisans to escape back into the forest above.

Almost in unison, the partisans abandoned their positions behind rocks on the scrubby, wet hillside. Climbing back up into the forest was difficult due to the wet grass. Albert slipped and fell while climbing back up the embankment. As he rose to his feet, a bullet tore through his back. The bullet pushed through the front of Albert's clothing, thrusting out a wad of blood, tissue and cloth. He fell to the ground, writhing in pain. Leon and Hershel moved down the embankment to help, while the other partisans poured on covering fire for the rescuers.

Through a hail of German bullets, Leon and Hershel reached Albert. They picked him up and began to carry him up the sharp hillside. Blood was pouring from Albert's chest wound. Chrusciel observed this and realized that Albert was likely suffering from arterial bleeding. The bullet must have severed a major artery. While Chrusciel was not without pity, he calculated that Albert would probably die before they could bring him to the top of the embankment. Even if he survived that far, he would slow the rest of the group's escape. Anton had to make an executive decision. His mind worked like a fine Swiss clock. He pushed strong emotions aside and quickly reached a logical commander's decision. *If we try to save Albert, the Germans will capture us all.* He paused his covering fire long enough to exchange cartridges on his machine gun.

Leon and Hershel continued to struggle mightily bringing Albert back up to the top of the embankment. Albert was unable to help at all. He apparently was unable to move his legs. With each breath, blood spewed from his mouth and nostrils. The Germans were now advancing up the hillside. Bullets flew past the rescuers, whizzing through the air and zinging off of rocks and trees. Suddenly, Hershel felt as though someone yanked his left arm and threw him to the

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ground. He looked down and saw that blood was flowing from his arm. He had been shot. Guessing from the strength of the blow, it was probably a bullet from the 50-caliber machine gun mounted on the train. Now, Leon, Hershel and Albert were lying on the side of the embankment, in plain view of the advancing Germans. Hershel looked at Albert, whose pupils slowly floated up into his eye sockets. He was losing consciousness. He then looked at Leon who was wild-eyed in panic.

Chrusciel observed this and quickly, with a loud whistle and hand signs, ordered everyone to escape immediately. If Albert was not already dead, he would be within minutes. Chrusciel had now lost two of his partisans. Another partisan was wounded. *There is no way to save the mission or to hurt the German war machine. It is time to go.* Leon saw that Hershel was in trouble and helped him up the embankment, while the remaining partisans fired upon the advancing Germans. Shortly, all of the partisans, minus Jacob and Albert, were racing back into the forest.

Anton had one final task. He had to kill his wounded comrades. If captured, they would reveal critical information about the partisans under torture. He could not take that chance. He waited until he thought that Rachael was not looking and aimed his rifle. He slowly depressed the trigger on his rifle and shot Albert in the head. Quickly, he turned and aimed his rifle at Jacob, who lay unconscious upon the tracks below. He found Jacob's head in the rifle's sights. He put the cross-hair upon Jacob's head. Slowly, carefully, he pushed the trigger. Nothing happened. He was out of ammunition. Frantically, he searched his pockets for more ammunition. He had used it all! Chrusciel quickly searched for a nearby partisan, to retrieve more ammunition. No one was near. With a frown, Chrusciel turned and ran back into the forest.

Rachael observed the nightmare below from behind a large, slippery rock near the top of the embankment. She saw Jacob fall on the tracks below and injure his left leg. She shrieked when she saw that he could not bear weight on his injured leg. Still, there was hope that he could repair the dynamite problem and hop back up into the safety of a large rock. She started to run to help Jacob, however she was held back by someone. It was Hershel. Somehow, he had known what she would do and he now held her tightly with both of his arms. "No! Let me go," shouted Rachael. She was desperately riveted to the scene below. "Someone has to help him." Rachael screamed.

When she saw the train slowly rolling towards Jacob, she began to scream louder. She was in danger of giving their position away to the Germans. Hershel put a large hand over her mouth to stop her. He whispered in Rachael's ears, "Don't shout. Do you want all of Germany to see us?" He then put his arm on her shoulder to comfort her. "But they will see him," replied Rachael as she sobbed on his shoulder. Her heart was racing. She was terrified of losing her beloved Jacob. Her mind was also filled with confusion. *Why is the train rolling to a stop here? There could be no reason for it to stop here. What is happening?* Then she saw German soldiers on both sides of the train and she realized that it was an ambush. *Someone alerted the Germans about our plans!* Rachael was furious. *Someone is a traitor! But who could it be? And the victim of this*

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treacherous act is Jacob! Then the shooting began. The Germans saw Jacob on the tracks and began shooting at him.

When she saw Jacob shot in the leg, Rachael screamed in anguish. "Jacob!" she shouted. "Come back!"

Hershel held back Rachael with all of his strength. "Rachael," he screamed. "You cannot save him. He is surrounded!" Rachael continued to scream for Jacob, although it was impossible for anyone else to understand her above the sound of the storm and the gunfire. When she saw the German soldier lower his rifle butt on Jacob's skull, she fainted. Solomon joined Hershel and they scooped Rachael up in their arms, carrying her to the safety of the forest above.

Chrusciel paused at the top of the ravine and looked one last time into the embankment. Albert was sprawled in the same position on the side of the hill, his arms and legs pointing in various directions. Jacob was still in the same position on the bottom, dead or unconscious. Chrusciel was furious. *Someone will pay for this! I will find the traitor and he will pay with his life.* As a bullet whizzed past Chrusciel's ear, he turned and ran into the forest to join his comrades.

Chapter 29

Recaptured

Jacob awoke in the back of a German Army truck, rumbling slowly across a road that he recognized. It was near Theresienstadt. He was covered in blood, from head to toe, although incredible pain emanated from his left leg and his head. He was surprised to be alive. He had a pounding headache and could not see out of his right eye. At the same time he was furious about being recaptured. *Who was the traitor among the partisans? Was there any way that I could have avoided recapture?* He was lightheaded, probably from blood loss. Jacob guessed that he had torn ligaments in his knee when he fell on the wet tracks near the dynamite. The bullet that tore through his leg must have hit an artery. But Jacob was more concerned about being interrogated. He had heard about brutal techniques used by the Gestapo. *I will tell them nothing about the partisans!* After all, Rachael was with them. She, and their child, would be in danger if he told the Germans where to find them.

Jacob was also embarrassed that he had been captured. The mental anguish was almost as deep as the physical pain. It was his first mission and now it was a failure. Worse yet, the partisans would expect Jacob to take his own life, as soon as it was possible. He made a vow to Chrusciel to destroy himself if captured by the Nazis. Rachael made the same vow. Now, it was necessary. But how could he do it? How would he be able to take his own life? He could not even stand up! His mind was spinning with contradicting thoughts. *Perhaps I will bleed to death and it won't matter.*

Two people sat in the back with him, along with four German soldiers. They wore black leather coats, despite the heat. Jacob understood that they were Gestapo. They were taking him back to camp, where they would interrogate him. He had no qualms about killing himself. He accepted the fact that his death meant nothing to the partisans' efforts. On the other hand, he could not bear the thought of surrendering information that could result in the deaths of his new comrades. He thought of Rachael and their child. He understood how much he meant to her. He would have loved to help her raise their child. He also considered the welfare of his parents. They would miss him too.

The truck finally arrived at the camp. The familiar electrified gates were opened and they drove past the guards to the commandant's office. The two Gestapo goons dragged Jacob out of the car. He screamed as pain shot through his left leg. Blood again began pouring through his leg wound. *If I'm fortunate, I will bleed to death. Then I won't have to kill myself.*

On the way to the infirmary, they passed the office of the new commandant, Colonel Hans Gruber. As they passed his office, Gruber spoke briefly with the Gestapo. He looked at Jacob and began to scream for his surgeon. Jacob was suddenly very dizzy. A high-pitched whistle echoed in his left ear. His vision

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was dimming, the world darkening. Jacob was barely conscious. But he was alert enough to hear Gruber scream at the Gestapo about getting Jacob to the infirmary. "You will pay dearly if he dies!" screamed the new commandant. "Dead men cannot tell us anything!" Jacob found it humorous enough to chuckle about it. Upon hearing Jacob laugh, one of the Gestapo members took out his pistol and smashed the butt of the gun on top of Jacob's head. Jacob lost consciousness as a wave of blackness fell upon him, his last thought was of wonderment; his right ear now was whistling the same high-pitched song.

Chapter 30

Reunited

Jacob arrived at the infirmary unconscious. It was too small to be considered a hospital, but Theresienstadt had a modest infirmary, headed by none other than Dr. Moshe Silverman. Jacob carried no identity and the commandant was not aware that he was an escaped prisoner. Gruber thus had no idea that the doctor trying to save the life of his prisoner was in reality the prisoner's father. He only knew that Jacob was one of the partisans and that he needed the prisoner alive to extract information.

Moments after Jacob arrived, Gruber stormed into the infirmary, demanding to see Moshe. "If this new prisoner dies, so will you." With an afterthought, he added, "And so will your family!" Gruber scowled at Moshe. His dark eyes were fierce. Moshe scrubbed his hands while the nurse prepared Jacob for surgery.

From the operating theater of the infirmary, Moshe heard his nurse call out to him. "Dr. Silverman, you should come in here."

Moshe was irritated. "I am getting ready as fast as I can, Nurse Greenburg." Normally, that sort of tone was enough to stop the soft-spoken nurse from speaking. This time, it did not.

"I mean it," she replied. "You really must come here."

Irritated, Moshe came into the room and paused with his wet hands stretched out waiting for surgical gloves to be placed upon them.

When Moshe saw Jacob's face, he shuddered with fear and shock. *My God, it is my sweet Jacob! How can this be? He escaped!* He was suddenly shocked by the understanding that the man bleeding to death before him was his son. Now, as he accepted the situation, he trembled with fear. *I cannot allow my only child to die!* Moshe took a deep breath as he wondered how Hanna would react if he told her that he could not save their son's life. "Get all of the surgical instruments, Nurse Greenburg. I'm going to need you now!"

Moshe shook his head as he examined Jacob. His scalp was torn open in two places and was bleeding profusely. "I only hope that his skull is intact," Moshe said through his surgical mask. Nurse Greenburg nodded, with eyes wide open. As Moshe examined his left leg, Jacob stirred and moaned. He picked up Jacob's leg to examine the bullet hole and immediately noticed how badly the knee wobbled. "Something is wrong with the knee, in addition to the bullet hole. I think he has some torn ligaments and tendons." Moshe then mumbled something about "orthopedic surgeon" that Greenburg did not understand. "Nurse," he continued. "We are going to be here for a while."

During the next five hours, Moshe stabilized Jacob's blood loss, sutured his leg wound, sutured his torn scalp and stabilized his left knee. He regretted that he was not an orthopedic surgeon, although he understood what needed to be

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done. Unfortunately, he had little prior experience doing it. The knee was damaged very badly. Two ligaments and two tendons were badly torn. A great deal of time and effort was required to suture them in place. One of the ligaments, the anterior cruciate ligament, was shredded. To repair it, Moshe had to cut off the shredded portion and then suture the solid tissue behind it together. "I fear that he will never again have full mobility on this knee. He will walk with a limp for the rest of his life." As he said this, a tear fell from the corner of his left eye. Another tear dropped from his right eye, sliding down across his face. Greenburg wiped it off. *I am doing the best that I can son. But the damage is too great.* After finishing the last suture, Moshe leaned back against the wall. His head was covered with perspiration and his back ached fiercely after bending forward for so long. "I have done the best that I can, my son" whispered Moshe. "At least, you will live."

Jacob opened his eyes to a blinding white light. The light was so powerful that it hurt. He moaned and moved in bed. His head and his left leg ached ferociously. Nurse Greenburg noticed and walked to his bedside. "The light," moaned Jacob. Greenburg turned and closed the window blinds. The room immediately darkened, to Jacob's great relief. Greenburg called out and, within seconds, Moshe walked in. He had tears in his eyes as he walked to Jacob's bed and gently held Jacob's face in his large, soft, warm hands. It was the most tender and gentle caress that Jacob had ever felt. If love could be transmitted through touch, no love would have been more powerful than this. The two best friends had been reunited. The father and son melted into each other. Jacob began to cry. "Father, oh how I have missed you," Jacob whispered hoarsely.

They talked for hours about Jacob's escape and his new leadership role with the partisans. Moshe swelled with pride. They talked about Rachael and her pregnancy. Jacob was tremendously proud to be able to give his beloved father a grandchild. Then, suddenly, Moshe's expression changed in a strange way. He looked up and stared absently for a moment. His mind seemed miles away to Jacob. Then, with moist eyes, Moshe told Jacob the story about how as a child, he had seen a vision of an angel. The angel appeared to him in the middle of a great pogrom, in the village that he and Hanna shared as children. As Moshe told the story, Jacob noticed that his father's hands were shaking slightly.

"I was seven years old when Russian gangsters attacked our village. We called them Cossacks. They would kill the Jewish men, rape the Jewish women and plunder the entire village. They did this in part because the Jews almost never fought back – even when they outnumbered the Cossacks. During this particular pogrom, my parents were killed, in front of my own eyes." Moshe's eyes were distant as he spoke, as though he was once more a child. "I was seven years old when the four drunken Cossacks entered our small home. My parents made no attempt at resistance when they ransacked our house. They were looking for money, jewelry – anything that had value. My father was a poor tailor. We had but a few kopeks in the house, which my parents provided to the Cossacks upon demand. Two of the Cossacks then left the house with the money and virtually all of our family's valuables. Of the remaining two, one seemed particularly interested in my mother. This one – a redhead with a full beard – walked

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over to my mother. The other was an older man who was almost completely bald. They stumbled and smelled heavily of liquor.

“‘Come with me into your bedroom,’ shouted the redheaded Cossack to my mother. She cried, looking at my father. Suddenly, my father screamed and jumped on top of the filthy redheaded man who was about to hurt my mother. ‘No,’ my father screamed. ‘You may not have my Anna!’ My father began pounding upon the redheaded Cossack and pulling at his hair and beard. They struggled for a moment, bouncing off of walls and into furniture. I looked at my mother and saw in her face a fear that I had never seen before. My poor father’s face was red as he struggled with the invader. He pulled on the Cossack’s beard and the man screamed in pain.” Moshe paused, in deep agony. His eyes were wet with tears.

“Father,” said Jacob. “You do not have to tell me this.”

Moshe looked down at Jacob and smiled. He venerated that smile. It had always meant comfort, stability, safety and control. But, Jacob adored his father too much to see him cry. But Moshe was steadfast. “No, Jacob. I must tell you this story. You see, it has to do with you and what you have become as a man.” Jacob realized that his father was proud. But, he sensed that there was more to the story than that. “I must finish the story, Jacob.”

“All right, Father. Continue the story.”

“As I said,” continued Moshe in a soft tone. “My father was tussling with the redheaded man. Oh, my poor father was so overmatched. He was only a tailor and had never been in a fight in his life. Still, he came to the defense of my mother. Well, another Cossack ran to the aid of the large redhead. The older man jumped on top of my father and stabbed him in the center of his back with a very large silver-handled knife. The bald man was now in a fury and he kept stabbing my father repeatedly. I remember my father screaming. With each stab, blood spurted out into the air. I watched as it splattered on the bald man’s head. Within a few seconds, my father stopped screaming and the redhead threw him onto the floor. He was completely limp, although his eyes were wide open.

“My mother now began to scream. I had never heard her scream before. She was such a quiet woman. She ran to my father, but she was thrown backwards by the redhead. She hit the wall hard enough to leave a dent in the plaster. I remember seeing a red smear in the center of that dent on the wall, where my mother’s head had hit. She fell to the floor, dazed but still conscious. ‘I’m taking this one now,’ said the redhead to the bald man. With that, he took my mother into the bedroom.” Moshe paused. “I just continued to stare at the smear of blood from my mother’s head upon the white wall. It was as though I was transfixed by it.”

After another lengthy pause, Moshe told the rest of his story. “I looked back and forth between the bald man and the bedroom. Although it was dark in the bedroom, I could see the redhead tear my mother’s clothing off. I watched as the man placed his hands over her breasts. She tried to get up. He picked up my mother and threw her onto the bed. I kept looking at the bald man for help. I was frozen with fear. He looked into the bedroom and saw the redhead on top of my mother, as he pushed himself into her over and over again. My mother began

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moaning and twisting her body underneath the redhead. The man's breathing quickened and he began to grunt. Oh, God. I will never forget that grunting sound. He sounded like a pig. He sounded like a pig." Suddenly, Moshe buried his face in his hands and began to cry. His body heaved and shuddered.

In his mind, Moshe watched as the Cossacks continued to rape his mother. But, he could no longer say aloud what he saw. He could tell no one of the terror. It was too intense, too bloodthirsty and too embarrassing. Yet, he could not stop thinking about the tragic event. Like a movie playing his mind, Moshe was forced to relive the horror again. Jacob watched as his father bent forward, staring at the floor in silence. He was seven years old, sitting upon the floor in his poor old house. His father's bloody body lay nearby, his dead eyes staring at the ceiling. Straight ahead, in his parent's bedroom, his mother was being raped before his seven-year-old eyes. It was the vile redhead. He pushed and shoved himself inside of her. Each time, his mother screamed in agony. It was as though a spear had been thrust inside of her, over and over again. Finally, with several prodigious grunts, the redhead seemed to be done with her. He pulled out from her and began to walk away. As he began to pull his trousers back up, he shouted, "Lev, it's your turn!"

The bald man, who had been watching the redhead rape the woman, now moved into the bedroom. He dropped his trousers and pushed his underwear down. The redhead walked out of the room and looked down at Moshe. "Like what you see, little man?" he said with pride. "This is what a real man looks like," said the bald man whose engorged member now threatened Moshe's mother. In a moment, the bald man was on top of his mother. "Hey, Mikhail!" the bald man screamed at the redhead. "You did her in, you know. She's all bloody!"

The redhead replied, "So what, it still works!"

Soon, the bald man began to groan, as the redhead had done. With three intense grunts, the bald man was done. Standing before little Moshe, he wiped blood from himself, using the bed linen as a towel.

His mother was still conscious and she was moaning. Blood was coming from between her legs and from the back of her head. Moshe saw that she was trying to get up and out of her bed. She began to call his name. He saw her try to stand, but she fell to the floor. She looked up at the two Cossacks and tried to scream at them. "Look at her," said the redhead. "She's just a stupid, Jew-bitch. She's not worth anything anymore." Moshe watched from his spot on the floor as the redhead walked back into the bedroom. His mother had managed to crawl from the middle of the bedroom to the doorway. Moshe suddenly edged around her towards the kitchen. He remembered that his back was to the kitchen wall. Moshe watched in horror as the redhead picked up his mother and threw her into the wall. She fell down and the redhead picked her up by her neck. He picked her completely up from the floor and she began to choke. Suddenly, he slammed her head into the wall with all of his strength.

Bright red blood began to spurt out of her head, flowing down across her face and naked body to the floor, where it formed a puddle. She was still bleeding heavily from between her legs, as well. Moshe watched as the bright red blood flowed down her milky-white thigh to the floor. "Finish her off!" cried the

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bald man. The redhead pulled out a very large hunting knife and slit Moshe's mother's throat, from one side to the other.

For Moshe, the sight of his mother's bright red blood streaming through the air was simply too much to handle. He stood up as it landed in long dripping streaks on the white plaster wall. He was astounded by the volume of blood that came out. Suddenly, almost in unison, the two Cossacks who had murdered his parents looked directly at Moshe. He had been slowly moving out from the dining room and into the kitchen. Now, with all of his power, he ran through the kitchen and out the back door. He was thirty meters away from the house when he turned and saw that the Cossacks were only then coming out of the back door. Moshe flew across a small field and into the dense forest behind the house.

Moshe had bent forward, his head close to Jacob's face. He suddenly looked up, wiping away the tears. But, his eyes were far away. Jacob was entranced by his father's sudden confession. Slowly, Moshe continued the story. "Inside the forest, I ran as fast as my legs could carry me. This was my territory. Like the other children in our village, I had spent a great deal of time in the forest. We had built forts and tree houses and I knew each and every tree. I knew the best hiding spots, from playing hide and seek with my friends. At first, I could hear the men calling to me. They shouted that they would not hurt me, if I would only stop and come back. But I knew better than to trust the men who brutalized and killed my parents. I ran faster and faster until I could no longer hear the evil men chasing me. Only then did the tears come. I stopped momentarily to catch his breath and discovered that I was crying uncontrollably. Tears streamed down my face. At the age of seven, I was on my own. I had never felt so alone and frightened. Then, I heard the men again. They were still chasing me!"

Moshe seemed somewhat calmer as he told the final part of his horrific story. "I ran through the forest all the way around the village. Finally, as I neared a clearing, I stopped to listen. I had a terrible stitch in my side from running so far and so fast. I listened intently and heard no sound. Perhaps the Cossacks had given up the search. I stood there, inside the forest at very edge of a large clearing. Behind the clearing was a large embankment, leading to a house at the top. I stood just inside the forest, wondering what would happen to me now, when suddenly I heard a gunshot from up near the house. I heard men yelling at someone. There was more shooting. Suddenly, an apparition appeared to me unlike anything I had ever seen. At first all I could see were white wings or robes flowing in the wind. I blinked hard to see if this apparition would disappear. It did not. In fact, the flowing white wings appeared to getting closer. I then saw a face inside the white apparition. Then I saw a body. It was the body of a thin young woman. Her face was pale and almost as white as the flowing robes or wings around her. She seemed in pain, or frightened. Being seven years old, I understood this to be an angel. She looked like angels I had seen in prayer books from Sunday school. I continued to watch from this hidden and protected vantage point, just inside the forest. There was more yelling and shooting from behind the angel. Still it continued to flow down the embankment. I realized that the angel was coming directly at me. I was frozen in fear. I knew that angels helped people who had died to go to heaven. Was this angel here for my parents?"

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Was I about to die? I was petrified. I tried to turn and run, but found that my legs would not move. It was as though I was stuck in concrete. In this moment of pure fear, I realized that I could do nothing but accept death. I rationalized that I would be with my parents in heaven very soon. The angel was now flowing down the embankment towards me. She was almost at the edge of the forest! It came as no surprise to me that the angel looked directly into my eyes. Suddenly, I heard a sharp cracking sound from behind the angel. Unlike the other gunshot sounds, to which the angel seemed impervious, this one caused the angel to fall. As she fell, her eyes remained directly upon me. In fact, her eyes seemed to burn into me. The angel fell right at my feet. I stared into her eyes. Her white wings flowed behind her in the wind. From the ground, the angel looked up directly into my eyes. She blinked twice and then she spoke to me. It was the most overpowering moment of my life. I heard the angel say four words. She said, 'Yours will save many.' Suddenly, she collapsed into death. I backed away from her in fear. What happened? What does this mean? I am not going to heaven now?"

As his father retold this extraordinary event from his childhood, Jacob listened intently. But, when he heard the sentence "Yours will save many," a chill went up and down his spine. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up and he felt a wave of nausea wash over him. His father was still talking, but Jacob was no longer listening to him. His father's words frightened Jacob in a way he had never experienced. *Why? What do they mean?* His mind raced. His father was saying something about feeling guilty for not being killed. He fought his own demons for years over the guilt of living while his parents had been killed. It did not seem fair to him. But Jacob could not escape from those four meaningful words. "Yours will save many." They echoed through his mind. He thought about his nightmare. *Has my destiny been foretold?*

Jacob had never considered himself a leader or a very brave person. He was mediocre athletically and never had volunteered for a leadership position, even when others urged him to lead. But now, in the camps, something was drawing him out into the open. He felt driven to lead others, as though he was following some inert genetic command. Jacob did not believe that his newfound motivation resulted from an ego driven to seek acclaim. He had always shunned the limelight, even when he deserved it. Something was now pushing Jacob to act. *But why? For what end?* Jacob was tortured by those words. *What, exactly am I supposed to do? And, why should I do it? Will it be a moral and ethical act? Who shall I lead? When?*

He looked up and saw that his father had stopped talking. They looked into each other's eyes for a moment. Moshe put his arm on Jacob's shoulder and said, "I think that you are supposed to do something important here, Jacob. Do you understand what I am saying?" In silence, father and son held each other close. Moshe sighed. *How many times will we be able to do this again?*

Jacob desperately wanted to know his mother's condition. It was now almost three weeks since he and Rachael had escaped. At that time Jacob's mother was seriously ill with typhus. "Where's mother?" he asked Moshe. Moshe looked at the nurse and whispered something to her that Jacob was unable to hear. The

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nurse left the room quickly. Jacob's heart nearly stopped. He could not bear to hear that his mother was dead.

Moshe sat in a chair next to Jacob's bed, softly stroking Jacob's arm and shoulder. When he spoke, it was almost a whisper. "Mother was very ill with typhus. We had no medication." Jacob was in anguish. He was now certain that his mother had passed away. Moshe continued, "I tell you, Jacob, I've never seen your mother look like that. Her weight was very low and she was weak. Then, she developed pneumonia in one of her lungs. I gave her very little chance for survival." Moshe lowered his head, leaving Jacob with the all but certain impression that she was gone.

Suddenly, the nurse appeared in the doorway. She was carrying something. It was an intravenous bottle. The tube was attached to something or someone. The nurse seemed to struggle for a moment. The tube was attached to someone's arm. She then led Jacob's mother through the doorway. *She is alive!* The nurse helped Hanna to Jacob's bedside. His mother looked like a human skeleton. Her arms like twigs. Paper-thin skin covered her bones. She had almost no muscle at all. Her face was also so thin that for a moment, when she entered, Jacob did not recognize her. Thin, white stubble had replaced her silky long brown hair. But, when she smiled, Jacob recognized her.

Hanna looked terrible, but she was alive and, apparently, recovering. Jacob looked back at his father on the other side of the bed. The two of them smiled in a way that only they understood. Jacob's dear family was together again. They were injured, ill, malnourished and mistreated. They were on the dreadful road towards the Nazis' "final solution." But, for the moment, they were alive and holding each other. The room was filled with love. Nurse Greenburg smiled broadly and left the room.

Chapter 31

The Partisans Without Jacob

Rachael cried constantly while returning to the partisans' cave headquarters. She sat in the cave near a fire, her arms wrapped around her as far as they would go. She held herself in this manner, unable to stop crying. *How could this have happened?* The Germans knew exactly what the partisans had planned and exactly when and where to foil the plot. Rachael's sadness and fear mingled with anger as she realized that the traitor was probably nearby at this moment. *Someone here is responsible for Jacob's shooting and recapture. Who is it?*

Rachael's mind raced with dark thoughts. *Is Jacob still alive?* She saw blood spurting from his leg when he was shot. *Where was he taken? Is it possible that he was returned to Theresienstadt?* And, if he was alive, she knew that they would interrogate him. She also knew that interrogation meant beating him. The Gestapo was very cruel and would stop at nothing to obtain the required information. *Was he turned over to them? Will he live to see our child?* These thoughts tormented Rachael as she cried for hours.

The mood in the cave was like a funeral. The group was in despair. There was a traitor among them and everyone was frightened. They would need to move, since the cave's location was likely compromised. In addition, although he was only a partisan for about three weeks, everyone loved Jacob. His warm smile and exuberant personality attracted everyone to him. While no one questioned Chrusciel's leadership role, everyone accepted Jacob as a co-leader, even in such a short time. His absence made the cave just a little darker than usual. They all missed him terribly.

Chrusciel sat in his typical corner of the cave, his mind working on the same topic. One of his trusted family was working for the enemy and he was desperate to discover the traitor's identity. *It had to be someone on the Council. No one else had that much operational knowledge.* Chrusciel was desperate to find the answer. Suddenly, a solution to the problem became apparent. If he could feed certain information to selected Council members, the guilty person would be revealed.

Chapter 32

Interrogation

Jacob woke up on the morning of September 16th, with a dreadful headache. He had eaten very little over the past couple of days. As he tried to turn, a bolt of severe pain shot through his left leg. All of the horrific events of the past days came back to him in an instant. Despite the severe pain, Jacob was furious. Someone in the partisans was a traitor and he wanted to make sure that no one else became a victim. But here... what could he do?

While ruminating over the past days' tragedy, he could hear the sound of boots echoing in the infirmary. His heart sank. He knew who owned such boots. German soldiers at Theresienstadt were assigned boots with metal studs on the bottom. They could be heard from a great distance. In seconds, three German soldiers entered his room. Two of the soldiers were corporals. The other was Colonel Hans Gruber, Commandant of the camp. Jacob also noticed that his father remained near the door, to observe the interrogation. Moshe's heart was pounding with fear for his beloved son. He wanted desperately to stay at Jacob's side and bring him back to health.

The commandant stood over Jacob and sneered at him. "I am Colonel Gruber, Commandant of this camp." Gruber was tall, thin and balding. The commandant smiled graciously at Jacob. But, it also looked like a forced smile. It was tenuous, sly and brief. He looked to be in his fifties, his dark blond hair turning white in the front and on the sides. He had a long pale scar along the right side of his face, from the bottom of his eye all the way to his chin. The scar ran through a large area of pockmarks, likely the result of an adolescent battle with acne. He hardly filled out his dark gray uniform, the horizontal bars falling off of his shoulders. His trousers ballooned over his small, thin legs.

Gruber looked like a man who was very unhappy. Worse yet, Jacob feared, he looked like a man who would enjoy making someone else hurt. "I understand that you were here and that you escaped last month." Jacob tried to clear his mind. He had to be prepared for trickery. *He is fishing for information. I have not been back here long enough to be recognized.* Gruber had steel-gray eyes that seemed to penetrate Jacob. "You will be punished for escaping," Gruber said, appearing sinister. "But I see that you are injured, yes?" Jacob understood that Gruber was calculating his words carefully. He guessed that Gruber had rehearsed this conversation in his office. Jacob said nothing.

Gruber pulled the sheet of Jacob's bed back, exposing his badly damaged leg. He mused over the ghastly injury where the bullet tore through Jacob's thigh. "That is a very nasty wound, Mr.... uh... This was followed by silence. He was waiting for Jacob to respond. *I will not fall for such a blatant trap! Gruber does not know who I am!*

Like any good soldier, Jacob went into combat without personal identifica-

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tion. As a partisan, the Geneva Convention did not cover his war. He was under no obligation to expose his identity. This was unexpected and pleasant. Jacob's greatest fear was that the Germans would use his parents against him – that they would threaten to kill his parents if he did not cooperate. Still, Jacob thought, he would eventually be recognized. There would also be other Germans and Jewish prisoners who could identify him.

Suddenly, Gruber smiled broadly at Jacob. It was an evil smile that revealed hideous, dark and misshapen teeth. "Despite your rude disappearance from our lovely camp environment, I must welcome you back. *He is still fishing.*

Jacob quickly decided upon a ploy. "I regret to inform you, Colonel Gruber that I was not a prisoner here in the past. I am not the escaped prisoner that you seek." Gruber looked puzzled, for a moment. Jacob wondered if his ploy was working. So far, he had not seen anyone who remembered him. While all new camp residents had a number tattooed on their arm, Jacob arrived before this practice began. Still, if he came out of the infirmary, it would only be a matter of time until one of the guards recognized him. *That is, unless I can change my appearance. What if I grow a beard?*

Gruber stopped smiling and looked up at the ceiling for a long moment. Suddenly, he grabbed Jacob's leg and twisted it vigorously. Jacob screamed in agony. It felt as though Gruber had pulled his leg off at the knee. Moshe rushed to help his son. "Stop that! He is my patient!" One of Gruber's assistants took out his pistol and smashed it on top of Moshe's head. Moshe fell to the floor, unconscious. Jacob was infuriated and screamed at Gruber to stop. Then, Jacob realized that his own actions in reaction to Moshe's beating could give their relationship away. *I must remain calm and focused! Damn it! Does Gruber know that the doctor is my father?*

Suddenly, Gruber grabbed his leg and twisted it again, fiercely. Jacob howled in anguish. He was almost surprised to see that his leg was still there when he looked down. Sharp pains from his knee arrived in waves. Bright red blood began to pulse out from the newly reopened wound. Although Moshe had time to remove the bullet and suture the wound before Gruber arrived, the twisting opened it up again. Jacob was also very surprised with Gruber's sudden change in personality. He suspected that it was part of an interrogation technique. He desperately tried to clear his mind. He had to think quickly and remain focused.

Everything Gruber had done so far was a trick. He first had tried to gain Jacob's confidence, almost as a friend. When that didn't work, Gruber inflicted severe pain to show Jacob that he was in charge. But Jacob was still in charge of himself. He would rather lose his leg than reveal anything about the partisans.

Gruber continued unabated. He twisted Jacob's leg again. Jacob screamed in distress. Gruber paused long enough for Jacob to regain his ability to speak. "Now, young man, let's have a nice long conversation. We'll start with your real name."

Chapter 33

Partisan Politics

For days after the tragic failed mission, Rachael remained alone. She became depressed, wondering desperately if Jacob was still alive. She asked each of the partisans if they could get word of Jacob's condition from the camp. Unfortunately, the Germans had guessed correctly which remaining prisoners were connected with the escape. They were probably dead or sent to other camps by now. Rachael was frantic. She had to know if her beloved Jacob was still alive.

The few remaining Salzburg Jews tried to comfort Rachael. Hershel seemed to always be near. At times, Rachael considered him as a guardian angel. He protected her. Hershel, who admired Jacob more than anyone, thought of Rachael as a young sister. They sat outside the cave, in the lingering sunset of a fall afternoon. There was a chill in the air, reminding Rachael that another winter would arrive soon. Movement in her belly underscored that another arrival was on its way. "Where is he, Hershel?" asked Rachael. "Do you think he's still alive?"

The thought that Jacob could be dead was unbearable to Rachael. Tears again flowed down her cheeks. Hershel put his arm around her shoulder. Unlike Chrusciel's touch, which made Rachael uneasy, Hershel's touch was warm and made her feel more secure. No one, since her father had been sent away, had made her feel safe that way. Hershel bent over to whisper in Rachael's ear. "I believe that he is alive," he said softly. "The Germans will keep him alive because they think that he will tell them about us – about the partisans. But, Rachael, you know how strong Jacob is. He will do nothing that would put you in danger. Also, Moshe is there to take care of him. Can you imagine anyone else in the world who would give better medical care to Jacob than his father?"

Rachael smiled at Hershel. She looked into his deep blue eyes. His long thin face and bushy wide eyebrows always made Rachael feel safe. He was not an attractive man, with a bumpy nose, large lips, and wide chin. His arms were too long, giving him a gangly appearance. Still, Hershel was much stronger than he appeared. He could defeat three men simultaneously in hand-to-hand combat. His dark brown hair flowed across his forehead, over his large ears and his long, thin neck. Hershel looked like someone who had been malnourished for a long time. His eyes were sunken deep into his face. Under different circumstances, this apparition might have been frightening to some people. Still, Hershel comforted Rachael and made her feel safe.

Now, looking into Hershel's eyes, Rachael felt more composed. "We must find a way to contact him," she said.

Hershel considered this for a moment. "Give me a little time. I'm sure that there is a way. Anton must have a way to contact people in the camp. After all he did it before we escaped." Hershel noticed Rachael frown when he mentioned

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Chrusciel's name. He knew that Chrusciel had intentions towards Rachael. Everyone did. It was very obvious. As he got up to leave, Hershel gave Rachael a hug. He was somewhat surprised to discover that she would not let go.

Rachael gripped Hershel's arms and held on tightly. "Oh, Hershel, please help me. I have no one else to turn to. Please, please, please." Rachael continued to sob into Hershel's shirt.

"I will help you," Hershel whispered into Rachael's ear. "I will help you."

Meanwhile, Chrusciel devoted the days after the failed mission to planning for the discovery of the traitor. He knew that he had to do this alone, since the traitor could be anyone. He could therefore trust no one. After much deliberation, he produced a plan. Several new missions would be created. He would supply each Council member with specific mission information in advance. They were instructed to be at a certain place at a certain time. If he was testing someone, the missions would be called off at the very last minute. Chrusciel would then go to the mission's location. If Germans were waiting for them, he would know the traitor's identity.

The days and weeks passed. Each day, Chrusciel seemed to spend more time with Rachael. He wanted to know everything about her. He made certain to eat with her often. He constantly hovered near her, offering assistance. Late one evening, Rachael went outside the cave for a walk. As she stood under the same grove of trees where she and Jacob made love only weeks earlier, she suddenly heard a rustle of leaves behind her. She looked for her rifle, which was balanced against a nearby rock. It was too far away. If the person rustling the leaves nearby was dangerous, she was unprotected. Then, Chrusciel emerged from the bushes. He walked over to Rachael and stared at her for a long moment. "You should have your gun nearby at all times outside of the cave," he said. Suddenly, Chrusciel lifted his hand and stroked the side of her face gently. "Someone as beautiful as you deserves protection. Others may take advantage of you."

Rachael knew that Chrusciel desired her. It was obvious to everyone. Jacob noticed it immediately, but did not wish to insult the leader of the group he had just joined. Rachael was flattered with the attention at first. But now, she was frightened by it. She moved back a step, creating physical distance from Chrusciel. "Anton, Jacob and I are thankful for all of your help. We love the partisans. But, I am Jacob's wife. I love him. I will never stop loving him."

Not taking no for an answer, Chrusciel moved a step closer to Rachael. "My dear, I hate to have to say this to you, but he is probably dead by now. I was close to him when he was shot. The bullet must have hit an artery in his leg. Blood was everywhere. How could he survive that much blood loss? Besides, if he is he is alive, he is back in Theresienstadt." Chrusciel then lowered his voice for maximum effect and continued. "You must understand, Rachael, that *if* he is still alive, the Germans will torture him. They will do anything to make him reveal information about us." Gently, Chrusciel put his hand under Rachael's chin, pulling her head up so that they looked into each other's eyes. He whispered to her. "Even if he survives their torture, he will be deported to a death camp in Poland. Or, they will kill him. So, Rachael, how can he survive? It's time that you consider moving on with your life. You will need someone to

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protect you – to look after you. And, Rachael, being in your condition, not just any man will...”

Rachael suddenly exploded with rage and slapped Chrusciel’s face. “I am Mrs. Jacob Silverman!” she shouted at Chrusciel. “I will follow him wherever he goes, even into the death camps! I need no protection from you, nor do I need you to remind me of my condition. I am carrying a child whose name will be Silverman. Do not attempt to take advantage of me, simply because my husband is not here to protect me!”

All of the anger that Rachael had harbored since Jacob’s capture was pouring out in a torrent of rage. She ran back into the cave, back into the darkness, with no place to find solace. Now, lying next to a fire that had almost burned itself out, Rachael was alone. She shivered in the cold air. To no one, she whispered. “I am alone. God help me.” The baby moved in her womb, as if to remind her that she was not alone. *But, who is the father?* Every day Rachael prayed that her baby would emerge with dark brown or black hair. She prayed that they baby would look like Jacob. *If not... how could I live with myself?* She finally drifted into a restless sleep.

The next day, Chrusciel called a meeting with all of the partisans present. All missions had been cancelled. Everyone was instructed to drop activities and return to the cave. When they all arrived, the cave entrance was very crowded. Rachael had never seen all of the partisans together, since at any given time many were out on missions against the Germans. Now, with all present in the cave, she was stunned to see their huge number. There were more than a hundred people in the cave. They sat in groups talking and sometimes laughing. These people had obviously been working together for a long time.

As Chrusciel stepped into the cave, the buzz from conversations quickly subsided. Each of the partisans now faced Chrusciel. Their respect and admiration for him was amazing to Rachael. She believed that each of these “soldiers” would easily give his life for their young commander. Everyone knew about the failed mission. Therefore, everyone knew that there was a traitor in their midst. They knew that this would be one of their most important meetings. In an instant, they were totally quiet.

Chrusciel stood at the cave entrance, looking down at his band of partisans. Streaks of sunlight from behind cast Chrusciel starkly against the darkness. Rachael thought that he looked like an angel, with beams of light emerging around his head. All that he needed was wings, she thought. She wondered if he arranged his position on purpose, for that reason. Rachael had very mixed feelings about Chrusciel. She thought he was very dashing the first time that she saw him. She was surprised that someone so young could be the leader of a large group of partisans. He was tall and handsome, and Rachael noticed immediately that he was attracted to her. She was very uncomfortable about that. After all, she was married and loved her husband very much. She would die for Jacob. He was her first and only love. But something else also caused her discomfort. Until now, she had been unwilling to explore that feeling. Despite her recent argument with Chrusciel, she understood that his attraction to her had ignited something deep inside. Could she be falling in love with him? Nonsense, she thought. But, if

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not, then why did her heart beat faster when he was near? *Do I truly want him near?* She suddenly felt guilty for exploring that nascent feeling. Her mind was spinning with thoughts she could not tolerate. She pushed those thoughts aside.

Chrusciel stepped forward. The cave went silent. Everyone stared at him with rapt attention. He began to say something and stopped. Then, he began again. "My comrades, we must leave our home here forever. Our last mission was a failure. It failed because the Germans knew exactly where and when to find us. Someone here is a traitor. We also lost our new friend and leader Jacob Silverman to the Germans. He was captured. While I trust Jacob like I trust you, we must accept that the Germans torture prisoners. And, they use drugs that can make people talk. Although we must leave here, we will continue to fight the Germans, who have taken our land and killed so many of our friends and relatives. I swear to you that we will fight on in the future. We will never stop fighting, until we have won the war. Will you continue to fight with me?"

Everyone in the cave shouted their approval in unison. With sparking eyes and broad smiles, applause broke out in the cave. It echoed and resounded throughout the cave until it seemed as though thousands of people were shouting and clapping their hands. Chrusciel picked up a rifle that was nearby and raised it in his right arm over his head. "We will fight on," he screamed. "We will fight on!" Then, everyone in the cave picked it up themselves. Soon, all of the partisans were screaming it in unison. "We will fight on," echoed through the cave as Chrusciel turned and walked away.

Late that night, Chrusciel joined Rachael near a roaring fire, just inside the cave. Rachael looked at him sheepishly. "I'm sorry that I hit you," she said softly. "I've never done that to anyone before."

Chrusciel looked at Rachael and said, "There is no need for an apology. I should not have touched you in that way. It is I who should apologize." They sat together in silence for several minutes. Abruptly, Chrusciel moved closer to Rachael. For a moment, she thought that he was trying to advance upon her again. However, Chrusciel maintained his distance. He then spoke in a low and soft voice, almost a whisper. "Rachael, I have a plan. I know how to discover the traitor." *Is he saying this because he trusts me, or because he is testing me?*

Rachael said nothing, but looked back intently. "Here is my plan," said Chrusciel. "I will tell the Council members separately where our new home will be. Each person on the Council will anticipate our move. Then, I will post a scout at each of the false locations. When the Germans go there to kill us, we will have our traitor. Whichever Council member tells the Germans where to find us will be the guilty party. What do you think?" Rachael was surprised that Chrusciel would divulge that much secret information to her. He obviously trusted her a great deal. It was a humbling moment for Rachael. She also had gained more respect for Chrusciel.

"I think it's a good plan, Anton." It was the first time that she had called him by his first name. Chrusciel's eyes lit up and he smiled. His smile was contagious. Rachael did her best to avoid blushing.

"We must keep this plan to ourselves, Rachael. Do you understand? I have told this to no one. Secrecy is absolutely critical. You will keep this a

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secret, yes?" Rachael nodded her head. Chrusciel smiled and got up. "We are partners?" Again, Rachael nodded. Somehow, she was still unable to trust him completely. His eyes were always on her, often lingering in a way that made her very uncomfortable. He stuck his hand out and Rachael shook it. It was warm and comforting. *Has he changed? Can I trust him?*

The next day, Chrusciel put his plan into action. Each of the ten remaining council members met alone with Chrusciel. Each was given a different location for the new base of operations for the Partisans. Most were in nearby caves. Some were abandoned buildings. One was even inside of a town. They were told to prepare to move their belongings to that specific new location at a certain time. They were even told which path to use. Chrusciel allowed enough time in between each location so that he could personally be there when the Germans arrived. Just in case, he ordered a trusted scout to be there. He then passed the word that the move would occur on Tuesday, October 12th. Chrusciel allowed enough time for the traitor to reach the Germans and provide the false location to them. There was also enough time for the Germans to assign a large enough detail of soldiers to fight and capture the partisans. All he had to do was wait and move from one location to another, until the Germans were there. The traitor would soon be identified.

Chapter 34

One Last Wish Before I Die

Jacob lay on the cold concrete floor of his new home, the “high security holding cell block,” as the Germans called it. He tried to focus on reality. *What day is this?* Jacob thought it was October 9th. *Or could it be the 10th?* He was transferred to this ghastly, cold cell from the hospital yesterday. *Or, was it the day before?* The Germans had been interrogating him constantly since his return to Theresienstadt. They knew about his escape and assumed, correctly, that he had joined the partisans. Now they wanted to extract all of Jacob’s knowledge regarding partisan activities. Meanwhile, they were starving him. After three days and almost no food, Jacob found it difficult to focus his mind for more than a few seconds at a time.

All that Jacob could really focus on was the intense severe pain coming from his left leg. Since his injuries were no longer life-threatening, the Nazis removed him from the infirmary. Moshe was no longer allowed to treat Jacob’s injuries. It now appeared that Jacob would keep his leg. But the area around the bullet hole was terribly painful. Pus had begun to run out of it. Jacob was certain that it had become infected. Worse yet was the horrific shooting pain from his left knee. Each time he moved, the pain would come crashing back in waves. He was also frightened about making a recovery. He knew that his knee was badly damaged. And the Germans often twisted his damaged knee during interrogations.

“Tell us the leaders of your group of communist criminals,” they asked repetitively. “Tell us where the Partisans live,” they demanded. They often shoved Jacob’s face into a map, demanding to know where the partisans kept their weapons and dynamite. Each time he failed to reply, one of them twisted his left knee. The pain was horrific. He often fainted from the severity of the pain. Each time he passed out, the Germans revived him to consciousness with smelling salts. It was like momentarily escaping from hell, and then being brought right back. The devastation was almost as bad psychologically as it was physically. Still, Jacob did his best to remain in and comprehend reality. He would rather die than give the Germans information that could lead to Rachael’s death.

Gruber had assigned his most repugnant officers to interrogate prisoners. Among those were lieutenants Wilhelm Bockler and Eugen Eichberger. At least twice every day, Bockler and Eichberger had Jacob taken to the “IR,” as they fondly called the interrogation room. The IR was a stark gray room 3 meters by 5 meters, with only a few chairs and a long table in the center. Yellow and brown retaining straps lay across the table. Jacob noted on his first trip to the IR that the table itself was badly blood stained. Above the table was a large overhead black lamp, attached by black metal arms to the floor. This powerful lamp was adjustable in all directions, as well as for height. It was by far the most penetrating,

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bright light that Jacob had ever seen.

The IR's central bloodstained table also had wires attached to it. The wires crawled across the floor like black snakes, undulating towards the table. The ends of the wires had been stripped of insulation. The copper wires there sparkled in the powerful overhead light. There were usually four or five straight-backed chairs surrounding the table. The two lieutenants, one or two "helpers" and sometimes a visitor occupied the chairs. More often than not, the visitor was Gruber.

During these interrogation sessions, the room was totally dark, except for the overhead light, which washed the prisoner in bright light. The prisoner was brought into the room first, and then bathed in the intense light. In this way, prisoners were unable to visually identify their interrogators. Names were never exchanged. At least one person was constantly writing every spoken word. Jacob called that person the "recorder." Soon, however, Jacob began to identify the voices of the interrogators. He then matched them with individual soldiers and officers during moments of carelessness, such as when meals were brought in or while he was being transported.

In most cases, interrogators had to create wounds in order to generate enough pain to extract useful information. With Jacob, this was not necessary. They only had to twist his left leg, or pinch the sutured bullet hole. This created instant horrific pain that Jacob found virtually intolerable. During the days and weeks that the torture continued, Jacob eventually found himself wishing for death. But death would not oblige him.

Jacob had never felt pain like this in his life. It seemed beyond anyone's ability to bear. Still, every time that he was asked questions, he thought about Rachael and the baby. He would say nothing that could hurt them. So, he resisted. Day after day and week after week, Jacob resisted the torture.

Finally, after almost a month of daily interrogation, the commandant came in to see him. For a long moment, he simply stared at Jacob, who had been strapped naked upon the table. His wrists and ankles were bound by tight leather straps. Gruber gazed down at Jacob in silence with his hideous smile, bad teeth and crooked scar. Finally, he frowned. "You think you are so strong, don't you." Jacob opened his mouth to say "no," but Gruber suddenly threw a punch that hit Jacob squarely in the middle of his face. There was an explosion of pain as Jacob's nose shattered and rivulets of blood slid down the sides of his face. He could feel the blood flowing down the back of his mouth, forcing him to swallow repeatedly. He lifted his neck and spit out a mouthful of blood. The pain was excruciating, like the pain from his injured left leg. He was dizzy and felt nauseous. Images in front of his face became blurry. Someone from the side gave Jacob smelling salts. The world quickly came back into focus.

"You think you are so strong and so clever, Jew boy!" Gruber continued in a calm but firm voice. "Well, I am allowed no additional time with you." Jacob looked up at him and tried to focus through the pain. "Yes," Gruber continued. The Gestapo has arrived. I must turn you over to them. Who knows what *they* will do to you?" Jacob understood that Gruber was offering him one last chance to offer information about the partisans before the "second team" took over. But in this case, the second team would be even more fearsome than the first team.

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But Jacob would still not speak. His thoughts were filled with Rachael and his parents. *I must get well so that I can save my parents and then find Rachael.* Then he thought about how Rachael was carrying his child. These were the priceless treasures in Jacob's life. He would clearly rather die than hurt them.

Gruber stared down at Jacob for a moment. Suddenly, he bent over to whisper in Jacob's ear. He had never done this before. In each interrogation, Gruber, or one of his staff, interrogated him loudly. They almost always screamed at him. Even the staff member who recorded each conversation was abusively loud with Jacob. But suddenly, Gruber was whispering. He was attempting to portray himself as Jacob's friend. *This is new.* "Tell me where we may find your friends and I will send you back to the infirmary. Please, we want to help you. You have serious injuries to your leg and you require surgery. We want you to be able to walk again. We want to help you." This was whispered in such a soft and silky tone that Jacob almost expected sugar to begin to flow from Gruber's mouth.

Jacob looked up at Gruber and spit a huge wad of partially clotted blood directly across Gruber's face. The dark mass of sticky fluid dripped down into Gruber's mouth before anyone in the room could react to Jacob's rebellious act. Gruber jumped backwards, knocking the interrogation recorder off his feet and onto the floor. Jacob could hear Gruber retch as he ran out of the room. The sound of his boots echoed off the walls as Gruber ran towards the lavatory. Jacob then looked at the recorder, now lying on the floor only a few feet from him. The recorder, a small and timid young man, looked dazed and frightened. Although he knew that it would be painful, Jacob screamed and lunged at the frightened recorder, making him scream and run out from the room. Although this was one of the most painful moments of Jacob's life, it was also one of the most satisfying moments. He chuckled as he enjoyed his brief victory.

Moments later, Gruber appeared at the doorway. He had bloodstains on his shirt and his jacket. Blood still dripped from the edge of his chin. He was livid. "Laugh! Go ahead and laugh!" Gruber screamed at the top of his lungs. "Tomorrow, the Gestapo will take you. If you think we have hurt you, just wait for the Gestapo. They will give you a new meaning for pain!" With his tirade over, Gruber turned and walked back down the hallway to his office.

Jacob continued to laugh quietly, alone in his cell again. He lay upon the freezing cold concrete floor. He had no bunk, not even a pile of straw upon which to sleep. Jacob had been deprived of any comfort whatsoever. There was no water, almost no food and no place to rest other than the filthy, freezing floor. He had resorted to eating captured insects, to stay alive. A bucket was provided for elimination. The cell was very small. Jacob had never been so miserable. He was in constant pain. But the thought of being turned over to the Gestapo was sobering. *I wish that could have seen Rachael one last time! Dear God. Please give me the strength to withstand this torture. If not, please grant me a quick death.*

Chapter 35

The Gestapo

The Gestapo wasted no time in prisoner interrogation. The Reichstag did not promote slackers. In fact, interrogators with poor results were demoted and sent to the eastern front. And nobody wanted to go to the eastern front. And, that was on the mind of SS Lieutenant Colonel Bernhard Bender. Bender had only last month been promoted to Colonel, based primarily on his ability to interrogate Jewish prisoners. Bender rose through the Nazi ranks rapidly, climbing upon the skulls of tortured and killed Jews. What was his secret? Bender was one of the few Gestapo officers fluent in Yiddish.

By December, Jacob had wasted away to almost nothing in his cell. He ate less and less each day. His weight was that of a grade school boy. When he stood, his ribs showed clearly through skin so pale and thin that was almost transparent. His wiry legs bowed out due to vitamin deficiency. His hair was very long and hung in filthy clumps upon his gaunt shoulders. He had a thick beard that was wild in every direction. Jacob was constantly cold, filthy and weak. To make matters worse, he was now covered with fleas and ticks. He understood that this was a recipe for disease.

The interrogations had subsided throughout much of November. However, one day in early December, Jacob was revived and taken to the interrogation room. He was barely conscious and shivering. As usual, his captors removed his clothing before taking him to the IR.

Jacob had lost track of time. He could not recall if it was November or December. Time now played tricks on him. Without a window, Jacob was deprived not only of light, but also of time. He could tell by the ever-decreasing temperatures that winter was approaching. He slept more and more, although his sleep was fitful and filled with terrible dreams. In his dreams, he was once again forced to shove the bodies of recently-killed Jews into an enormous fire. He wore the now familiar striped pajamas. Sometimes, in his dreams, he saw that among the dead were his parents and Rachael. He was forced to burn them as well. During the few lucid moments, Jacob wondered what had happened to his parents, to Rachael and his friends among the partisans. He thought that perhaps he was already a father. He was not certain, but he believed that Rachael was to have their child in December. The baby was the only positive thought that Jacob had anymore. A newborn human had been born from the genetic footprints of him and Rachael. This was nothing short of a miracle.

During the Gestapo interrogations, Jacob found himself in depths of torture that he had not imagined. Pain was now his constant companion. The torn ligaments in his knee were healing poorly. Scar tissue would eventually complete the connection, but Jacob would never again walk without a limp. The bullet had also broken off a piece of Jacob's fibula. He would forever be at risk

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of a broken leg.

Meanwhile, the Partisans of Chrusciel had been very active. Throughout the fall of 1942, they continued to destroy German fuel depots, ammunition warehouses, train tracks and landing strips for airplanes. Sometimes, they even attacked German positions in the field, before disappearing back into the forest. For the Germans, it became maddening. The partisans learned about guerrilla warfare. They learned how to hit at the enemy and run before they could be caught. Anton digested military strategy ferociously, eager to put it into action. He delighted in their newfound ability to derail German transport trains.

The continued interruption of train traffic from the partisans' bombings now reached all the way to the top. Hitler was made aware of this problem and was furious. The Gestapo was well aware of the partisan Chrusciel. In fact, Chrusciel's influence now was moving north and east – all the way to Poland. His triumphs against the Nazi Reich had begun to inspire other partisan groups throughout Europe. Although the partisans themselves had no hope of defeating the German armed forces, their continued infiltration and bombings were beginning to take a toll upon the German war infrastructure. Germany relied upon trains to carry most of its required food, supplies and war material. The more the partisans bombed train tracks, the more the German Army, Air Force and Navy were impacted adversely. Ammunition arrived late. Fuel was unavailable. Spare parts were missing. Soldiers went into battle hungry and lacked cold weather gear. All of this trouble was, to a large extent, the responsibility of one man – Chrusciel. By the end of 1942 he had become a legend in his own time.

Meanwhile, Bender, along with Wilhelm Bockler and Eugen Eichberger, were assigned the task of breaking Jacob Silverman, and with him, the partisan's operations in that part of the country. Their key to success was in the mind of Jacob Silverman. His knowledge would enable them to arrest Chrusciel and bring him to justice. In the process, they would become heroes of the Third Reich.

On January 2, 1943, Jacob was awakened at 7:00 a.m. as his jailers threw a bucket of cold water on his almost naked body. Bockler and Eichberger stood over Jacob, screaming at him to get up. Startled and shivering, Jacob struggled to stand. Bockler put his arm out to help Jacob, but Eichberger slapped it down with his arm. "Never help an inmate to get up, you fool!" Although both German army soldiers were trained to be brutal with prisoners, Eichberger was particularly devoid of compassion. When Jacob was routinely beaten for refusing to provide information about the partisans, it was Eichberger who was particularly violent. It seemed that there was no end to his rage.

Jacob stood to the best of his ability. However, he had trouble maintaining his balance. Eichberger looked at his watch nervously. He seemed very impatient. Finally, both jailers took Jacob by the arm and dragged him to the IR. Much of the time in the IR, Jacob was seated in a chair under the bright light. This time, he was strapped to the table in the center of the room. He glanced at the electrical cord that snaked across the room to the table. As usual, the copper wires at the end of the cord gleamed in the bright light. Something was different this time. Jacob was certain of it. As Bockler and Eichberger left the room,

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Bockler gave Jacob a rather sad glance. However, as Eichberger reached the doorway, he turned to look at Jacob. With an evil smile, he said, "I think you will enjoy today's session, Jew boy! In fact, I think that you will find it particularly stimulating." The two jailers laughed heartily at this cruel joke. As the door was closed, Jacob believed that he understood what the cruel comment meant.

Jacob waited anxiously in the IR. His stomach rumbled and churned. He had been offered less and less food. Worse yet, there were fewer insects to capture in the winter. He had lost so much weight that he resembled a skeleton. His hair now fell over his shoulders and his long beard was wild and unkempt. He was hungry all the time and his stomach had become painfully distended. His skin was paper-thin and his bones stuck out everywhere. By the end of December, because of his starvation, Jacob had begun to lose his teeth. His gums bled constantly and his legs barely held him when he stood up. Jacob wondered how much longer he could live under such conditions. He was beginning to find it difficult to organize thoughts.

After about five minutes, Bockler and Eichberger returned. Although Bockler was in the way, Jacob thought that Eichberger bent down to plug the wiring into a wall outlet. Jacob struggled to move. However, the straps holding his arms and legs were too tight. "Don't struggle," said Bockler. "It won't help. Then, he heard the hum of electricity in the room. The hairs on his neck stood up. *He did plug the cord into the wall socket!* Shortly, Eichberger walked to the table. He looked at Jacob with contempt. "You will be having guests today," he snarled.

The two jailers sat in wooden straight-backed chairs near the table and waited with Jacob. Following a long silence, Bockler looked down at the floor and sighed. "You have heard the bad news from the eastern front, Eugen? I heard that the Russian winter has killed a hundred thousand of our troops." Eichberger kicked Bockler hard on the leg, almost knocking him off of his chair. Bockler howled in pain.

"Shut up, you idiot!" shouted Eichberger. "You know that we are not allowed to speak about the war in front of a prisoner."

Bockler rubbed his leg and mumbled, "It won't matter with him. He'll be dead soon anyway."

Jacob mulled these new thoughts carefully. *So, it seems that the war is not going well for Germany. Yes, others have made the same mistake. The French army failed under similar circumstances.* The Russian army was clearly making progress, confirming the BBC reports from the radio that Rachael had stolen. *How long ago was that?* It seemed like ages. *How close are the Russians?* This news gave Jacob renewed hope. Perhaps the British and the Americans were also making progress. Although Jacob had been determined to remain silent about the partisans, this news gave him all the more reason to be silent.

Suddenly, the door opened. Two officers walked in. Jacob struggled to see who they were. They wore the black uniform of the Gestapo. One was younger than the other. He was rather short and chubby, with very short hair. He was a lieutenant. The other officer was tall and thin, with longer, but closely cropped blonde hair. He carried himself well, as though perhaps he was an aristocrat. His

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uniform indicated that he was a lieutenant colonel in the Gestapo. Jacob wondered why such a high-ranking officer would be dispatched to him. Could it be that the partisans were having such a powerful impact upon the Nazi armed forces? *It must be! The partisans must be a big problem to the Nazis. Why else would they send a high-ranking officer to interrogate me?* For the first time in many months, Jacob was happy. He was happy to hear that the Germans were being beaten back by the Russians. More importantly, he was happy to hear that the partisans were active. *Keep up the good work, Anton.*

The tall one approached Jacob with a very wide and engaging smile. He quickly produced a syringe filled with a yellowish fluid and injected it into the large vein of Jacob's left arm. *What is he giving me?* In seconds, Jacob was dizzy. The medication made him sleepy. *This man wants to be my friend.* His smile would not stop. He hung over Jacob like some lifeless image, created for political purposes. He had a long, thin face and a somewhat pointed nose. That's not to say that he had a nose that looked like a beak. But, it looked aristocratic to him. He indeed carried himself that way. Jacob thought that if he didn't discard that smile in another ten seconds, it would break off and fall to the floor, lips tumbling this way and that way all the way to the ground, where they would shatter into a thousand pieces. *This man is so thin that he would disappear in a stiff wind.* His smile seemed to bore directly into Jacob. The medication had made Jacob's head swim. It became difficult to organize a thought before it drifted away forever. *I feel the medication. What is it doing to me?* His blue eyes seemed to penetrate into Jacob's very soul.

The officer seemed to glide more than walk over to the table. Jacob fought to retain mental control. *This medication makes me feel better. What is it?* In a quiet and formal way, the man introduced himself as "Lieutenant Colonel Bernhard Bender." But, something was wrong. Jacob's mind was like molasses. He could not focus his thoughts. Yet, despite the powerful medication, Jacob understood that there was something wrong with the way this German spoke.

What just happened? Something's very wrong. But what is it? Then, suddenly he understood. *This Gestapo officer is speaking to me in Yiddish! How can this be? Am I dreaming?* He expected Gestapo officers to speak German, French, English, or Russian. They should speak anything but Yiddish. It was truly amazing. This officer, whose job was to kill Jews, was speaking in the Jew's own language! And, he had a wide grin on his face, as though he was a long lost relative or friend.

Bender drew up to the table and slowly sat in a chair. The other Gestapo officer sat next to Bender, but slightly behind. "This is Lieutenant Woerrman," said Bender, pointing to the officer on his left. Woerrman sat stiffly and looked at the floor as he was introduced to Jacob. He looked like someone who had an ongoing love affair with food. Woerrman also had nicotine stains on the first two fingers of his right hand. He instantly produced a pad of paper and a pen. Rather than look at Jacob, Woerrman began to scribble on his pad. Bender, whose smile was now frozen upon his face, continued, "I will be asking you some questions and Lieutenant Woerrman will be writing down your responses. It is very important that you tell us the truth. We will know if you are lying. Boeckman and

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Eichberger remained silent, farther away.

Bender began speaking softly in Yiddish to Jacob. “First of all, how are you, my friend?”

Jacob’s mind was spinning. No one had spoken to him in Yiddish for a very long time. Now, this Bender was using it in a soft and pleasant way that made Jacob feel as though he was a genuine friend. Bender used a voice that was smooth and silky, still in Yiddish. “Is there anything that I can get for you? Perhaps some food or something to drink?” Jacob loved hearing Yiddish again. It was the language of his childhood. It was the language of his relatives and friends. He was also starving and thirsty.

“No, nothing,” replied Jacob. Only, Jacob spoke in German. He knew that Bender was simply attempting to gain his confidence. By replying in German, Jacob was showing Bender that he was too smart to fall for such tactics. *I must remain in control.*

Bender would not give up so easily. He continued to speak to Jacob in Yiddish. “Is there someone here in the camp that you would like to see? Perhaps you have a wife here? Are your parents here? Please, tell us the names of your loved ones and we will bring them to you.” Jacob knew that Bender was fishing. They might have suspected that Jacob was a former prisoner in Theresienstadt, but he also could have been with the partisans all along. Jacob did not have a number tattooed on his arm. Certainly, they knew that he was a Jew. This was apparent from his circumcision. Still, the prize was his knowledge of the partisans. Jacob knew who the leaders were, where they camped and what kind of armaments they had. Perhaps he even knew their plan of attack. This was priceless information and Bender was trying to open Jacob up as a “friend” using Jacob’s own language.

Jacob mulled these thoughts while remaining silent. Bender continued, again in Yiddish. “You escaped from here, didn’t you? Jacob remained silent. “Please, let me reunite you with those you love. I can even guarantee that you and your loved ones will remain safe from all future danger, in my custody.” Bender bent over the table and looked into Jacob’s eyes. He continued speaking Yiddish very softly. “Is your mother here?” Jacob thought about his mother. She was so sick and in desperate need of medical care. *Would Bender give her the care she needed to stay alive? Could he really trust this Nazi who spoke Yiddish?* Jacob was softening inside. The thought of his mother dying in this horrible place was terrifying. He opened his mouth to speak. He was about to ask if his mother would receive proper medical care. Thoughts buzzed wildly through Jacob’s mind. *Can I trust this soft, silky Nazi who speaks fluent Yiddish?* Bender bent even closer into Jacob’s face. Still in Yiddish, he softly said, “Jacob, you can trust me. I can guarantee that you and those you love will be safe. Please, trust me, my friend.” Jacob inhaled slowly and began to say something. All of the Nazis now bent forward to hear him. But instead of speaking, Jacob gathered the saliva in his mouth and spit it directly into Bender’s face.

Bender bent back immediately, with Jacob’s saliva dripping off from his nose and cheek. He was clearly surprised and angry. Boeckman and Woerrman were startled and stared at Jacob with open mouths. Eichberger stood up and

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slapped Jacob across his face. "You kike!" he screamed. Jacob's face stung and he thought that his nose might have been broken again. Still, despite the pain, he was glad to be in control.

Bender was at first stunned and shocked. Then something inside of Bender changed in an instant. He stood as straight as possible, removed a handkerchief from his coat pocket, and without any sign of emotion, proceeded to wipe Jacob's spittle from his face. Then, with a face of stone, Bender calmly told the guards to prepare Jacob for his next "treatment." He said this in German. Boeckman and Eichberger immediately jumped into action. Woerrman watched with an air of detachment as Eichberger ran across the room to plug in the wiring apparatus attached to the table that held Jacob firmly in its unyielding straps. Suddenly, the room lights dimmed and flickered. Jacob heard a soft humming sound from underneath the table. Again in Yiddish, Bender looked at Jacob and said, "You will be very sorry about that, young man." He stared at Jacob with his face of stone. "Soon, you will beg to speak with me. Soon, you will cooperate." He then looked at Woerrman and simply said, "Proceed." With that, Bender left the room.

Woerrman, who had stopped writing some minutes ago, put his pad down on a table and walked over to Jacob. He looked down at Jacob with contempt, as though he was looking at some strange and frightening insect. The yellow-stained fingers of his right hand pushed down on the edge of table. In a rather high-pitched voice, Woerrman said to Jacob, "In a few minutes, you will be sorry that your Jew-bitch mother brought you into this world."

Jacob heard Eichberger snickering behind Woerrman's prodigious body. Containing himself from laughing for a moment, Eichberger said, "Oh, yes, Jew-boy, you are about to have a shocking experience. The three Germans chuckled over that thought for several more seconds. Woerrman turned to move away, and then suddenly turned back to Jacob. He looked down at Jacob's face. Jacob could see that a great wad of fatty tissue hung below Woerrman's chin, caught above his tightly buttoned uniform. This large section of fatty tissue wiggled and jostled as Woerrman spoke. It reminded Jacob of a clown that he had seen in a carnival. The thought made Jacob laugh.

"Oh, by the way," said Woerrman in his high-pitched voice, "I forgot to give you something." With that, Woerrman dropped a large amount of saliva onto Jacob's face. Jacob felt nauseated as some of the saliva found its way into his mouth and nose. Being strapped to the table, there was nothing that Jacob could do about it. *I must stop thinking about it.* Besides, he thought, they are about to do something much worse to me.

Woerrman looked at Boeckman, who was largely silent through the interrogation and told him to begin. Boeckman put on a very large glove that appeared to be made of rubber. He gave another such glove to Eichberger, who had taken a spot on the opposite side of the table. He then carefully picked up the wires that had insulation stripped from their ends and spread the two wires apart. He gave one wire to Eichberger, being careful to grab the wire where it was still insulated. Jacob watched with trepidation as the two jailers now stood ready for action on both sides of him. They looked at Woerrman in silence. Jacob looked

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carefully at them. Boeckman had no emotion showing on his face. Jacob felt that, in Boeckman's case, he was simply "doing his job." Eichberger, however, had a look of excitement on his face. He reminded Jacob of a child waiting to open birthday presents. To Jacob, it was clear that Eichberger enjoyed inflicting pain upon others. He must have a great deal of his own pain underneath it all, Jacob thought. Woerrman, who said matter-of-factly, "You may begin," interrupted this thought.

Jacob watched as both jailers slowly moved the wires down towards his arms. The shiny copper wires sparkled in the overhead spotlight. Simultaneously, Eichberger and Boeckman touched the wires to Jacob's arms and electricity was injected throughout Jacob's torso. Jacob had never felt any pain like this. He was jolted upward, although still restrained by straps to the table. His entire body lifted up from the table. He could hear and feel the voltage humming through his body. The pain was mixed with an incredible tingling. It felt as though every cell in his body was held rigid in a fixed position. He screamed in agony. Then, the jailers pulled the wires back and the pain was gone. Jacob gasped for breath. The pain had been excruciating.

Woerrman walked back to the table with a wry smile on his chubby face. He bent over Jacob to gloat. Before saying anything, Woerrman took off his small round spectacles and cleaned them slowly with a handkerchief that he produced from his back pocket. Finally, he spoke to Jacob slowly, as though he was talking to a child. "Now, Jew-boy, you will tell us exactly where the partisans live and you will give us the names of their leadership." Jacob, who was still trying to catch his breath, remained silent. Woerrman, who seemed surprised by Jacob's silence, looked at Eichberger (who was on the other side of the table) and said, "Again."

Once more, Jacob screamed as the voltage hit him like lightning. His body seemed to jump up from the table by itself and was rigid. The horrible pain sizzled through his body. *Dear God no! I cannot take much more of this. Please, kill me God.* He tried to pull away from the wires, but found that he was virtually paralyzed by the voltage. He screamed again in anguish. Finally, after what felt like at least twenty or thirty seconds, Boeckman and Eichberger pulled the wires back. Jacob gasped for air as his body fell back onto the table. This time, the horrible tingling lasted for a long time after the wires were removed. Worse yet, there was a stench of burning flesh.

Woerrman again appeared at the table, next to Boeckman. "Tell us what we want to know, or we will increase the voltage." Again, Jacob was silent. Eichberger no longer smiled at Jacob's pain. He seemed puzzled.

"Shall we increase the voltage, sir?" Woerrman thought about this for a moment, and then agreed.

"Do it," he said to Eichberger.

Eichberger smiled momentarily, and then said, "Boeckman, it's on your side."

Boeckman bent down to pick up a small black box. As he did so, he stole a look at Jacob. Their eyes met for a moment. Jacob tried to read Boeckman's eyes. In them, he saw no sadistic delight, as he had seen in Eichberger's eyes. He

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also did not see the intense detachment that he saw in Woerrman's eyes. With Boeckman, Jacob saw a simple man who hated what he was doing, but had to follow orders. He believed that he also saw some sympathy. Nevertheless, Boeckman picked up the black box, which was humming loudly. This was a transformer, a switching box that could amplify the electrical current running through it. Jacob saw a switch with several settings on it. He saw Boeckman turn the switch to the next highest setting. With great exasperation, Jacob noticed that there were two more settings on the transformer that were even higher than this new setting. *I don't think that I can survive this any longer. Rachael, I love you!*

Moments later, another shock arrived in Jacob's arms and traveled like lightning throughout his rigid body. The tingling and pain was unbearable, as Jacob howled. Again, his body lifted itself up from the table, his back arched. But this time, it trembled in mid-air. Jacob thought that he would have been sent to the ceiling and trapped there, were it not for the restraining straps. He was in greater agony than ever before. This pain was worse than being shot and even worse than being tortured after he was shot. Jacob wondered if it would ever stop. Then, finally it did.

Again, Jacob gasped for breath. His body continued to tingle and his heart pounded in his chest. His ears were ringing loudly. He wondered how much more of this he could take. The smell of burning flesh was worse and he could see smoke as it lifted from his frame. However, something was wrong with his vision. He could only see objects directly in front of his eyes. His peripheral vision was gone, replaced by a hazy darkness. He heard Woerrman's voice, although it now seemed far away, as though he was in a tunnel. He could barely hear him beyond the loud ringing. He heard only a few of Woerrman's words. He thought that he heard "partisans" and "leaders" and possibly "weapons." But he could not hear enough beyond the ringing to make sense of it. He knew that his silence meant another round of voltage. He knew that the pain would be excruciating. But each time he thought about telling the Germans about the partisans, he thought about Rachael. He thought about their unborn child. If he told them what they wanted to know about the partisans, Rachael and their child might be killed. Jacob realized this and understood that losing his life was a small price to pay in order to save his beloved wife and child. With that thought, Jacob smiled.

Apparently his smile did not please his German interrogators. Jacob was slowly beginning to regain his sight and hearing. He heard Woerrman swearing and thought that he could see him stomping around the room. Eichberger and Boeckman stood next to Jacob, each with an arm in the air holding a wire, as they watched Woerrman's angry fit. In his rage, Woerrman reminded Jacob of an angry schoolboy who did not get his way. He threw his uniform jacket upon the floor, screaming about Jacob's lack of cooperation. In his tantrum, Woerrman's blubber jiggled and wobbled. His glasses came off and fell to the floor. He picked them up and screamed again when he saw that one side was broken, the shattered glass resembling a spider web inside the gold frame. Woerrman was furious and seemed almost out of control. The screeching in Jacob's ears was

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louder than ever.

Jacob looked at Boeckman and Eichberger, who were staring open-mouthed at Woerrman as he screamed in fury. He proceeded to throw any and every object that was nearby. Pieces of equipment splintered upon the concrete floor. A bottle of vodka flew into a wall and shattered. Jacob could not believe that this was the same mild-mannered man who had entered the room with Bender to take notes. Woerrman flew about the room, swearing and smashing objects for another moment or two, then spun around and stared at Jacob in stony silence. After a moment, he looked up at Boeckman and said, "Move it up to the highest level on the switch." Boeckman stared at Woerrman in silence. Suddenly, Woerrman screamed as loud as he could. "Do it NOW!" This was screamed in such a loud voice that he reminded Jacob of a soprano in an opera. Woerrman was clearly losing control.

Boeckman picked up the black box and again stared at Woerrman, who seemed to be attempting to collect his wits. He put his hand on the switch and then pulled it away. "We've never used it this high on a human before," he said softly. Boeckman seemed clearly concerned. Eichberger now gave the appearance that it was time to stop.

Woerrman jumped towards Boeckman, spittle flying from his mouth, screaming and swearing at him. "Do it," screamed Woerrman.

Boeckman looked down and said in a quiet voice, "It may kill him."

Still in a rage, Woerrman grabbed the black box and turned the switch to the highest level. He then looked at Eichberger and Boeckman and screamed at them. "Do it or I will have you both sent to the eastern front!" The two jailers looked at each other in dismay. Eichberger looked down as he moved his wire towards Jacob's arm. Boeckman looked sadly in Jacob's eyes and then moved his wire towards Jacob's other arm. Jacob's heart was pounding so hard he thought it would explode. *So this is it! I am about to die.* He thought about his father's childhood experience with an angel who said, "Yours will save many." *Well, that turned out to be wrong.* Then Jacob thought of his parents. *Are they still alive? If so, it would be best if they never knew how their only child had died. I miss them so much.* He particularly missed his father, who for so long had been his rock and his conscience. Then, Jacob thought about Rachael. *At least my wife and child have a chance to live on after me.* His heart ached at the thought that he would not be able to be with them – to help his child grow up.

Many thoughts flew through Jacob's mind in this, his moment before death. *How could his life come to this? Just three years ago, my greatest concern was making a decision about medical school. Where should I go? I wanted to go to Munich. My mother wanted me to go to the medical school at Linz. I suspected that she only wanted me to be closer to home. As usual, my father said nothing, except that he only wanted me to be happy. Then, along came my unexpected love for Rachael. I would have done anything to be close to her.* Now, the decision about going to medical school seemed like a lifetime away, and he was about to die because he was a Jew. *How could this happen? How could the world turn against us? What have we done to deserve this?*

Jacob watched as those shiny copper wires approached. In a strange way,

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they seemed beautiful to him. As death approached, he began to quietly say the Shema, the prayer that professes the Jewish belief in one God. Boeckman and Eichberger heard this and bent down to hear him.

Woerrman screamed at them. "What's he saying?" Of course, it was Hebrew and they did not understand.

As Eichberger moved down to hear, his wire approached Jacob's skin. Jacob felt it tingling even before the wire touched him. Jacob closed his eyes and continued mumbling the Shema.

"I think he's praying," said Boeckman.

"I don't care," shouted Woerrman in his high-pitched voice. "Kill him. Kill him. Kill him. Kill him!"

Behind his closed eyes, Jacob heard this and smiled. Woerrman's soprano screaming reminded Jacob of a character called "The Queen of the Night" in Mozart's opera, *The Magic Flute*. Then, his body jumped up and off of the table. The tingling this time was excruciating. He recalled the violin part that he had played for that aria. Suddenly, Jacob was completely paralyzed. He could not breathe. His heart pounded faster than it had ever pounded before. He could smell burning flesh. Finally Jacob's vision began to disappear, first at the edges, then towards the middle. Jacob wanted to die. Death would be preferable, rather than endure another moment of this horrendous pain.

Suddenly, the door opened and Bender stormed into the room. "What's the screaming all about?" Boeckman and Eichberger pulled back and the electricity was interrupted. Bender quickly walked over to the table and grabbed the black box from Boeckman's hands. He looked down and was clearly shocked to see that it was on the highest level. He glanced back at Woerrman, who looked completely out of control. He was wearing his glasses, with one side shattered, his shirt was out from his trousers, his jacket lay crumpled on the floor and virtually every object in the room had been broken in his tantrum. "Are you insane?" Bender screamed at Woerrman. "Do you want to kill him? How can we obtain information from a dead man?"

Bender looked from Woerrman to Boeckman to Eichberger, and then down to Jacob, who was unconscious. He seemed to be in disbelief. He quickly put his head down on top of Jacob's chest, his ear above Jacob's heart.

Woerrman, who had clearly been startled by Bender's entrance, became docile again, as he had been before. He began to pick up his clothing and the objects that he had broken.

Bender then screamed at Woerrman. "Get out of here. Tomorrow morning, you will be reassigned to the eastern front."

Woerrman began to softly cry, the blubber under his chin jiggling up at Bender. "Please, sir, if you would only forgive me for this one mistake." He was cut off by Bender's scream.

"Get out NOW, or I will shoot you before some Russian does."

Jacob, who had come literally within an inch of his life, heard none of this.

During the next two weeks, Jacob was forced to endure similar torture at least once each day. Bender used the same brutal techniques, beginning as Jacob's "friend and confidant," speaking Yiddish. Jacob's lack of cooperation again

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yielded the electric treatment, although the amount of electricity was never again on the highest setting. Bender came up with a new method, as well. In between torture with electricity, Bender had Boeckman and Eichberger shove Jacob's head entirely under water, in a large steel tub that was brought into the room. The water in that tub was near freezing and Jacob's head was under water for what seemed like at least a minute each time. Jacob thought that his lungs would explode, as he was not used to holding his breath that long. The transition from near electrocution to near drowning was horrible. Yet, Jacob refused to cooperate, even after more than two weeks of this daily torture.

Finally came two blessed days of peace. Jacob was allowed to remain in his filthy, freezing cell for 48 hours with no torture. On the way to back to his cell, passing a room with a large mirror, Jacob glanced at himself. He was startled. The image he saw in no way resembled him. His dark hair, which had not been cut for almost three months hung down in filthy ringlets to his shoulders. The image in the mirror showed a man who had been starved for a very long time. His ribs pressed tightly against his pale skin. The area between his ribs was black, so that from a distance he resembled a zebra standing on two legs. His face was gaunt and thin, with dark circles surrounding his sunken eyes. His pale blue eyes, which had always sparkled with vibrancy, were now flat and dull. Jacob stared at this strange person in the mirror with incredulity. He was shocked and frightened to see himself in such a deplorable condition. Jacob had seen people who looked like this when he went with his father on hospital rounds. It always preceded their death.

Jacob learned from Boeckman that Bender had been called to Berlin for a meeting. Jacob hoped silently that Bender was in trouble for failing to locate the partisans. When Bender finally returned the next day and Jacob's torture resumed, he was reasonably certain that his thoughts were accurate. Bender now had a new torture for Jacob. And his regular torture was stepped up. Clearly, Bender was now in a hurry to obtain Jacob's information.

On January 29, 1943, Jacob was led into the torture room and strapped to the table, as usual. Bender arrived moments later. He wasted no time trying to befriend Jacob with polite Yiddish. He immediately had Jacob tortured with electricity. But this time the power was turned up. Of the three settings, they started with the second one. When Jacob failed to cooperate, the setting was turned up to the highest setting. The last thing that Jacob remembered was the sound of sizzling electricity and the smell of burning flesh. His body lifted off of the table and became rigid. Jacob bit through his tongue and began to convulse. This time, he became unconscious.

When Jacob was revived, he was confronted with tremendous pain. He had almost bit his tongue in half during the electrical treatment and discovered that it had been roughly sewn together. His head ached fiercely and he was barely able to remain conscious. Bender was screaming at him. "Tell me where the partisans are!" Bender's face was bright red. Boeckman and Eichberger stood behind Bender, watching with amazement. Jacob could not have told them if he wanted to. His tongue had swollen to three times its normal size. Not only was speech impossible, Jacob had trouble breathing through his mouth. Each

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time that he moved his tongue, he received a jolt of severe pain. And, each movement broke loose the clots, giving Jacob a new mouthful of blood.

When Jacob remained silent, he received the water treatment again. Only this time, Jacob's head was held under water for a terribly long time. Although Jacob had taken in a large breath before being immersed into the large bucket of water, and he typically could hold his breath for about a minute, something was different this time. Jacob counted the time and, although his lungs were about to burst, he made it to one minute. But this time, he was not allowed up. Boeckman and Eichberger continued to hold Jacob's head under the freezing water. *Are they really trying to kill me? Had they given up? Is this the end?* Jacob's mind raced, as his lungs now were painfully empty. Although his eyes were closed, he began to see shafts of bright light in the darkness. He finally believed that this was how his life would end. He thought about his parents and about Rachael. He hoped that Rachael was still alive. The pain was now incredible. Finally, he stopped struggling and allowed himself to inhale. The freezing water from the tub went quickly into his lungs. Tremendous pressure came from his chest as his lungs became heavy with water. It was a very unnatural feeling and Jacob struggled involuntarily to push the water out of his lungs. But, there was only more water to come back in. After this brief struggle, Jacob again relaxed his muscles and allowed the water to remain in his lungs. He allowed himself to die.

Jacob lived in cold darkness as his water-filled lungs lurched on their own for air. His diaphragm contracted painfully. Boeckman, who was pounding on Jacob's back, suddenly pulled him out of the water and put him on the floor. Lying face down on the cold, concrete floor of the torture room, Jacob began to cough. A solid stream of water pulsed out from his lungs onto the floor. Jacob was amazed at the amount of water that emerged from his throat. He retched and coughed for some time as blessed air returned to his lungs. Boeckman was still pounding on Jacob's back, even though the water was out of his lungs. Jacob screamed at Boeckman to stop, with no success. He continued to see flashes of light, while his peripheral vision had faded away. Somewhere deep in his clinical mind he reminded himself that it was an effect of oxygen deprivation in his brain. He finally turned around and grabbed Boeckman's arms to stop the incessant pounding. Boeckman's face was frozen in terror. Jacob looked up at Bender and Eichberger, whose faces were also frozen in a look of amazement.

Bender stooped low so that his face was close to Jacob's face. He suddenly screamed at Jacob as loud as he could. "How did that feel, Yid? Now tell me where I may find the partisans!" Jacob tried to read his facial expressions. For the first time, behind the facade of hatred, Jacob thought that he saw fear. Yes, he was certain that fear now lived in Bender's mind. Jacob found that to be most satisfactory. He smiled up at Bender and said nothing. Suddenly, Eichberger's boot smashed into the right side of Jacob's head. A starburst exploded in Jacob's head, leaving him unable to see. As he slumped back to the cold, hard floor, he heard Bender shouting in the distance. Walking out of the room, he said, "It will be worse for you tomorrow, Jew-boy."

The next day, Eichberger and Boeckman brought Jacob into the torture room. This time, however, he was strapped into an old wooden chair. His thin,

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spindly arms were pinned and strapped heavily on top of the chair's arms. Jacob was again tortured with electricity. Again, he revealed no information. When Jacob thought that the torture was finished, Bender searched his uniform pocket and his hand emerged with a set of pliers. He gave the tool to Eichberger, who now sat next to Jacob. Eichberger held the tool up to the light, smiling at Jacob. This brutal excuse for a human being, who said little during the torture sessions, clearly enjoyed hurting Jacob. Boeckman, on the other hand, showed sympathy towards Jacob.

Bender pulled a chair near Jacob. "Please end this now. I know that you want to see your family again. We can help you do that, if you will tell us where the partisans are." Jacob looked at Eichberger, who had an evil smile on his face. He looked at Boeckman, who seemed frightened. Then he looked back at Bender, who was still smiling at him. "Please," said Bender, again in Yiddish. "Let me help you. Let's go back and find your family. I can allow all of you to leave this place. Yes, you can all return to your home. Don't you want to be with your family, Yaakov?" Bender used his Hebrew name. This startled Jacob. *How did he know that?* Jacob guessed that a German who had taken the time to learn how to speak fluent Yiddish would also know about Hebrew names. Still, Jacob refused to speak.

Bender's smile disappeared. It was replaced with anger. He now looked at Eichberger, who was still holding the silver pliers. "Go ahead," said Bender.

Eichberger smiled at Jacob, who assessed that only evil resided in this man's soul. Bender paced back and forth in front of Jacob. Eichberger grabbed Jacob's left hand, which was strapped tightly to the arm of the chair. He picked up Jacob's ring finger with the pliers located just below the joint. Still smiling, he closed the pliers around Jacob's finger until the bone snapped with a loud popping sound. Jacob screamed in pain. He looked down and saw that one piece of bone had broken through his skin. Blood steadily dripped to the floor.

Bender grabbed Jacob's face, pushing it up towards his own. "Now, you miserable kike, tell me where I may find the partisans!" Jacob's heart was pounding so hard that he was certain everyone could hear it during this brief moment of silence. Jacob said nothing.

Bender looked at Eichberger, and said "again." Eichberger picked up Jacob's little finger, which was adjacent to the finger he had just broken. He placed the pliers between the two lower joints. With a look of satisfaction, Eichberger closed the pliers around Jacob's little finger and broke it. Again, Jacob screamed in pain, just after the popping sound of breaking bones. This time, the bones did not break through the skin. But when Jacob looked down. His little finger was bent backwards, pointing straight up. The pain was ghastly. Jacob found that looking at it made the pain worse.

Bender was becoming agitated with Jacob's silence. He looked at Eichberger and the pliers broke Jacob's middle finger. Like his little finger, the middle finger was now bent up, at a ninety-degree angle. Jacob howled in agony. His left hand was mangled, with three badly broken fingers. Still, he refused to tell Bender about the partisans.

Bender was enraged. "Tell me now, Jew boy! Tell me now!" He screamed

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and ranted for several more minutes. He told Eichberger to move to the other side. Eichberger smiled and picked up the fingers of Jacob's right hand. "Last chance Jacob," shouted Bender. "Where are the partisans?" Jacob was silent. Eichberger picked up the pliers and placed them around the ring finger of Jacob's right hand. With a loud popping sound, the pliers broke that finger. Jacob wailed in agony. The anguish was horrendous. Both of his hands now screamed in pain. Still, Jacob said nothing. Bender looked at Eichberger. In a moment, Jacob heard the little finger of his right hand snap. He screamed again in pain. Looking down, Jacob saw that the broken bones of this finger also emerged through the skin. It was not a clean break. The piece of bone that had broken through was jagged at the end. Jacob worried that his fingers would never completely heal.

Bender, who had been pacing, now stood directly over Jacob, shouting at him. "Tell me where they are or we will find even more painful places on your body to break!" Still, Jacob was silent. He looked the other way as Eichberger broke the middle finger of his right hand. That finger too, broke through the skin. Jacob looked down at his mangled hands. Tears flowed down his face from the agony. Only his thumbs and index fingers remained unbroken. The pain was so intense that Jacob prayed for death. *Dear God, please take me now! I want to die!* Blood continued to drip to the floor where it pooled underneath the chair.

Eichberger grabbed the index finger on Jacob's right hand, as the door opened. "I said that I wanted no interruptions," shouted Bender at the lieutenant who stood at the open doorway. Jacob could see several staff members peering into the room, as though they were observing an interesting animal at the zoo. "Sir," the lieutenant began. "You might want to see this. It just came in by telegraph."

Bender walked over to the doorway and snatched the paper from the lieutenant's hand. As he read the paper, Bender's face turned pale. Finally, he crumpled the paper and walked back to Jacob. He stared at Jacob in bitter contempt. Then, saying nothing, he turned and strode out of the room, leaving everyone else in bewilderment.

Boeckman walked to the doorway and picked up the paper. He looked at Eichberger with wide eyes and handed it to him. As he handed the paper to Eichberger, he glanced quickly at Jacob and said, "The partisans have blown up our fuel depot. That fuel was needed for our Panzer division in France. Without that fuel, our battle against the British and Americans will be stalled." Suddenly, the paper was snatched away from him. "Shut up, you idiot," shouted Eichberger. "Now the prisoner knows. You're such a fool. Boeckman!" With that, Eichberger left Boeckman alone to take Jacob back to his cell.

Jacob was unceremoniously dumped back into his cell. His broken fingers caused continuous severe pain. He was starving, cold and barely alive. The pain was unbearable. Yet, Jacob smiled for a very long time. *Chrusciel and the partisans are alive and still fighting! They probably changed locations right after I was caught. But, I never told the Germans what they wanted to know.* Despite his tremendous pain, Jacob was very satisfied. In his own way, he was still fighting the Germans. And he was winning.

Chapter 36

From Death's Doorway To Redemption

Over the next two months, Jacob's health deteriorated. There were no more interrogation sessions and no more beatings. Jacob's fingers were never set and healed poorly. Yet, Jacob was left alone. It was a blessing. Perhaps Bender lost confidence in his ability to extract information from Jacob. Perhaps that information was no longer of significant value. Either way, Jacob was no longer being beaten and starved. But, Jacob's months of starvation and beatings left him inches from death. When he was recaptured in August, the Germans gave him almost nothing to eat. So, he did what he was taught to do as a Boy Scout and again by the partisans. Jacob supplemented his meager food supply with insects. Despite the frigid temperatures, roaches were always present. He had been taught how to survive in the wilderness and now it came back to him in prison. He even earned a merit badge for his work on wilderness survival. As a young Boy Scout, he captured and consumed ants, roaches, beetles and spiders. And, as terrible as it seemed to him three years ago, he now had no qualms about consuming insects. He required much more protein than he was offered by his German captors. Nevertheless, by late January, he had become too weak to capture insects. He thought about food constantly. The pain in his stomach was agonizing.

In February, he caught a small rat and ate it raw. He broke its neck and used his teeth to sever the head. Then, he sucked as much warm blood from the animal as possible. In another time, he would have considered such an act as lunacy and grossly disgusting. Yet, Jacob cherished every bit of blood and tissue that he could obtain from the rat.

He lay upon the cold cement after eating the rat, too weak to wipe the blood from his face and neck. *This is it. I've reached the end. Look at what my life has become. I should be well into medical school, but here I am eating rats in a jail cell. And, why am I imprisoned? What did I do to deserve this?* A coughing fit left him perilously weak. He had become too weak even to think. Without even a window, Jacob's mind began to turn inward. He began to have strange, disjointed thoughts. And deep inside his lungs, a battle emerged with tuberculosis.

In March, fluid began to accumulate in his lungs. Jacob had been having coughing fits for weeks. Now, he was coughing up blood. He had become too weak to exercise, then too weak to eat and finally, too weak to use his bucket for elimination. The Germans allowed him to lie in his own waste for days. Then, they placed a fire hose in the bars and turned it on full blast. The water was near freezing. Wherever it touched Jacob, the water felt like needles penetrating his skin. The agony was immeasurable. But, Jacob had become too weak even to scream. Later, icicles formed around his body. Hypothermia was his constant

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companion. By the end of March, the German guards were betting on whether Jacob would live to see the end of the week. He lay shivering on the icy cold concrete floor, staring up at the ceiling. Too weak to move, and too weak to speak, he prayed silently for a quick death.

Finally, on April 2, 1943, Jacob was transferred back to the infirmary. He was overwhelmed to see his father's face again, but too weak to talk. He could barely whisper. Moshe almost did not recognize his only child. He had never seen a person so completely wasted and near death. His own terminal cancer patients had looked better. He could hear the rattle of Jacob's lungs without using a stethoscope.

Moshe and Jacob cried together for a long time. "Where's mother?" whispered Jacob as soon as he saw his father.

"She's well, Jacob," replied Moshe. "She's still weak and very thin, but she has completely survived the typhus. She still works at the school and she was part of a group of us to create a new orchestra and choir. You should see her, Jacob. She's so proud of our musical groups."

As Moshe examined Jacob, he began to frown. He lifted Jacob's left leg up slightly and then turned it at the knee. When he twisted the knee slightly in each direction, Jacob flinched and bit his lip. Later, Moshe moved Jacob's twisted and swollen fingers, resulting in similar pain. Following a thorough examination of his son, Moshe's eyes were watery. Finally he sat on the edge of Jacob's bed. He was clearly troubled by Jacob's many injuries.

For several weeks, Jacob slowly healed in the infirmary. He had known that he would never heal completely. That is, Jacob understood that if he survived, he would probably be crippled. In a strange way, he had externalized that thought, to the point that it hardly bothered him. Torture, starvation and beatings were Jacob's constant companions. He could die at any moment. So, Jacob rarely thought beyond any day. Like everyone else, he was consumed with the task of daily survival.

From the beginning of his captivity as a partisan, Jacob understood that he had something that the Nazis needed – information about the partisans. If they could persuade Jacob to provide names and locations, trains would arrive as scheduled. As a partisan, Jacob also learned from his comrades just how important train travel was to the German war machine. He understood that even brief elimination of traffic could be of dire consequence to the German Army. Yes, Jacob had a goldmine inside his head. And the Gestapo would try their best to rip it out.

Jacob was disturbed to see that his father now looked much older and very frail. He had lost a great deal of weight and now had a long white beard, which made him look even older. To Jacob, he seemed like a different person. Moshe now moved slowly and with great deliberation. His hands sometimes trembled. Dark circles surrounded his eyes and his face was much more wrinkled. He was in his sixties. But he looked and moved like a man in his eighties. It was a very uncomfortable feeling for Jacob, who adored his father. Jacob sometimes thought of what it would be like if his father died. The very thought was intolerable. He could not imagine going on without his beloved father. Moshe was Jacob's rock

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and source of emotional support. Somehow, Jacob thought, he had to find a way to protect his parents.

"Jacob," Moshe whispered. "Have you had trouble walking on your left leg?" Jacob understood that bad news was coming.

"Yes, father. I usually need someone to hold my left arm up in order to walk. They would not give me a cane to use."

Moshe moved closer to Jacob on the bed. He placed Jacob's left hand in his own larger hands and held Jacob's hand softly. Moshe's hands were soft and warm, as Jacob recalled from his childhood. *Those strong hands have been my safety and security. Now they tremble with age and infirmity.* "Jacob, your left leg is not healing properly. Neither are your fingers." Finally, Moshe began to cry. He could not bear to see what the Nazis had done to his beloved son. Tears rolled down his sunken cheeks into his thick white beard. "I'm afraid that you may always need to walk with a cane. I believe that you will also continue to have a lot of pain in your knee. The gunshot has healed properly, but not the knee injury. Also, Jacob, your fingers may not heal properly. When they were broken, they should have been set and splinted." After a long silent pause, Moshe resumed. "Oh, my Jacob, what have they done to you?" Father and son held each other tightly for a long time. They cried in each other's arms for hours.

After dinner that day, Jacob woke up to see his mother sitting next to him in bed. They smiled and held each other. When Jacob put his arms around his mother he was stunned to feel how thin she had become. Both of his parents were gaunt, thin and looked to be about twenty years older than their actual ages. But they were alive and they were together. For that, Jacob was very grateful. As Moshe looked on from the other side of the infirmary and Hanna continued to hold Jacob's arm tightly, Jacob could not help but wonder about Rachael. *Where is she? Did she have our child? If so, is it a boy or a girl? Is the child healthy? When will we be reunited?*

As Jacob drifted into sleep, his parent's voices began to fade into the distance. He could only hear some of the words, but he became alarmed. His mother cried, "Moshe, when do you think it will happen?" She was clearly distraught. His father replied softly. "I don't know Hanna. Perhaps Jacob will be taken off of the list because of his injuries." They sat in silence for a while as Hanna continued to softly weep. Finally, Jacob could tolerate the confusion no longer. He sat up in bed and looked at his parents. "What are you talking about? What list?" Jacob's parents looked at each other and then back at Jacob. Moshe replied first. "We have been issued orders for relocation, Jacob." "I'm so sorry."

"Relocation" had taken on a deadly connotation in the Theresienstadt community. In late 1942, the community, comprised mostly of Jews, had reached over 80,000. By the time Jacob was strong enough to walk again, in the spring of 1943, he hardly recognized the camp. There were people everywhere. The barracks were overflowing with diseased and starving prisoners. And, almost all of them spoke Yiddish. There were dozens of new barracks and still the camp was bursting at the seams. The Germans had not planned on a relocation center of this size. Besides, Theresienstadt was meant to be a "show" camp by Nazi leadership. It was designed as a place to demonstrate to the Red Cross and other

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international aid groups how “well” the Nazis were treating Jews and other “undesirable elements of society.” Nazi propaganda ministers often filmed the Jewish orchestra and the Jewish educational system at Theresienstadt. This product they used to stem the increasing tide of discontent among international aid workers who had heard firsthand accounts of death camps run by Nazis through the Gestapo. A great deal of anecdotal information about atrocities had been reported in such interactions. But the overwhelming numbers of camp “residents” had now become a serious problem for Nazi leadership. They had to quickly produce a new “final solution” for the Jewish problem.

Despite the addition of barracks and other facilities, the camp had simply become overstuffed with prisoners. The only solution was forced relocation to other camps – usually “to the east.” In early 1943, many Europeans had become aware of German-run prison camps for Jews, from which no prisoners emerged. It must certainly have been difficult to ignore the massive clouds of ash, falling into the countryside and towns downwind from the death camps. The Germans for years had called these facilities “work camps.” One could only wonder what those people thought about the camps.

Most Jews had by now lost contact with relatives or heard firsthand accounts about death camps. At Theresienstadt in the spring of 1943, Jews lived each day in deathly fear of deportation to those camps. Some Jews lived in hiding in order to avoid relocation. They hid in attics, behind walls, in tunnels and even inside the pits of latrines. People would do anything to avoid relocation. The deportation trains now departed almost daily from Theresienstadt. Everyone understood that climbing aboard one of those trains was like climbing into their own tomb. Death was only a small red “relocation” notice away.

Jacob was stunned. While he understood the depth of hatred that Germans had for Jews, he also believed that his family would survive. He had always assumed that the relocation notices would come for others, not them. It was like getting cancer – always someone else’s problem. But this time, the notice had come for them. The news stung his mind. “How much longer do we have?” Jacob’s voice was shaking while asking that simple question. Moshe replied softly, “March 15th.” Jacob’s heart sunk. *If I were healthy, I would create a new escape plan for myself and my parents. But I am not healthy – not even close.*

Jacob was crippled and he knew that physical work would be impossible. “Are any of my friends from Salzburg still here?” Jacob thought that perhaps he could ask his friends to dig a new tunnel. His parents silently shook their heads at Jacob. He realized that his closest friends had already escaped and joined the partisans. “What about the tunnel that Rachael and I used to escape?” Again, his parents shook their heads. Hanna spoke this time. “Jacob, the Germans used a bulldozer to destroy the tunnel that you used. They found seven more tunnels since you escaped. All have been destroyed. They send out guards with stethoscopes now to listen for underground digging.”

Jacob lay back down again in his bed. The sounds of the infirmary were a constant reminder of his incapacity. He had never been so frustrated. He could not save his parents. There was no place to hide from the Germans. He realized that they would have to go to wherever the Germans planned to send them. Jacob

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thought relentlessly about how they might escape from the train. His mind wandered from plot to plot, each time with no realistic chance of success. Finally, aching from misery, he fell asleep.

As usual, Jacob dreamt about Rachael. In this dream, they had a young, precocious son. They were having a picnic. It was a beautiful sun-soaked day. The sky was azure-blue with random puffy-white cumulous clouds drifting above. There was a slight chill in the air, particularly with a gust of wind. But in the sunshine, the day was absolutely perfect.

Their son was perhaps six years old. He looked like Rachael, with thick dark hair over a wiry frame that looked like Jacob's. They were on the side of a large mountain, overlooking a huge valley. On one side of the valley, the ground was green. Various types of crops were cultivated there. On the other side of the valley, separated by a small dirt road, the ground was arid, covered with rocks and sand. Only a few scrubby bushes grew there. Jacob could not recognize his location. Nothing about the scenery was familiar, particularly the desert. It looked more like Africa than Europe. He heard no voices at all, except for his own, Rachael's and their son's happy chatter. Rachael laughed and put her arms around Jacob. Their son came over and the three of them held each other in contentment. It was a perfect moment. The only sound was the occasional gust of wind against their ears. It was a wonderful day for a family in love with each other.

Suddenly, there was an explosion. The ground shook underneath them. Someone was firing artillery from the top of the mountain ridge – less than a mile above them. The shells were exploding far down in the valley – in a tiny village on the green side. Jacob saw people scurrying around in the village, looking for a place to hide from the incoming artillery shells. They looked like ants fleeing disaster from such a great distance.

Jacob walked towards the edge of a shelf of rock nearby, so that he could look up and see who was firing artillery against a small, apparently innocent group of people. "Please don't go there," shouted Rachael over the booming artillery above. Jacob continued to walk to the edge of the large rock. He turned around and saw that Rachael was now screaming at him and wildly shaking her arms. Still, something made Jacob go on. When he reached the edge of the large rock, Jacob peered up at the artillery, which continued to fire upon the small village below. The men firing the artillery wore wrapped headbands. They looked like Arabs. Jacob saw four very large cannons, possibly German-made Eighty-Eights.

The Arabs relentlessly pounded the small village. Each time a shell hit a house or building, some of the residents that had been hiding inside came running out – speeding towards another building for safety. Some of them moved very slowly. Jacob surmised that they were probably wounded or perhaps children who did not know where to go. It was a relentless and brutal bombardment. Jacob saw people scurrying around the fields, running for some type of protection from the monstrous explosions. He also saw that there were others who could not escape. They lay upon the ground, dead or seriously injured. What had these poor farmers done to provoke such a horrible attack?

Jacob used his right hand to create a shadow over his eyes, blocking the

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sunlight. He squinted carefully to try to see who was responsible for this massacre. Finally, he could make out the figures at the crest of the mountain, as they continued to feed shells into the artillery. These men wore flowing robes instead of uniforms. Now, he was certain that the men at the top of the mountain were Arabs.

Suddenly, someone was shaking Jacob. He opened his eyes to see that Nurse Greenburg, in the infirmary, was speaking to him. For a moment, Jacob lived in that surrealistic moment when one wakes from a particularly vivid dream and is not certain if what they currently see and hear – is reality. Jacob had experienced another dream that was as realistic as life itself. He fully expected to find sand from the mountainside on the edge of his bed. *But, what does it mean?* These dreams frightened Jacob; particularly since his first such nightmare was now so close to reality. With every fiber of his being, Jacob believed that somewhere “to the east,” Jewish men were cremating Jews killed by Nazis. *Am I destined to go there and repeat my nightmare?* But what did this new dream mean? *Am I to go to a land occupied by Arabs? If so, why? And why were my parents not in the dream?* Jacob found that last thought very disconcerting.

As he focused on Nurse Greenburg, he was able to understand that she was telling him something important. She said that it was time to go. She helped him to dress and gave him a crooked wooden cane. Helene Greenburg, a middle-aged woman with dark hair, seemed ready to cry. All of her friends and relatives had been sent to other camps. She had not heard from a single one since their departure. Now alone and despondent, she stopped at the doorway and paused to look back at Jacob. “You won’t be able to walk very far, so use the cane,” she said in a shaky voice. “Your parents are already there.” With that, Greenburg abruptly fell into tears, turned and walked away. Jacob hobbled to the doorway. He wanted to ask her when his parents had left. But when he reached the doorway, Greenburg was gone. In fact, the infirmary was completely empty and dark. He was alone. Jacob thought that was very strange. *Why is the infirmary abandoned? Where is everyone?*

One by one, others joined Jacob as he walked to the train station. They walked in heartbreaking silence, carrying whatever remained of their possessions. The closer Jacob got to the train depot, the more people joined him. They clutched suitcases, briefcases, duffle bags and grocery bags stuffed with their personal belongings. Children walked next to their parents. The elderly walked with canes, bent forward by their loads. Jacob asked them who they were, but each question received the same silent reply. Most would not even look at Jacob.

The group marched in pathetic silence, entering the crowded train depot. Jacob realized that most of them wore black clothing. Men wore dark suits and tall black hats, while women wore black dresses. Even the children wore black clothing. *They must be Hassidim.* Hassidic Jews were the most reverent, observant Jews. Many Hassidic men devoted their entire life to the study of Torah. Now they prepared to board a train with their family. On any other occasion, they would be joyous to board a train. They could have been on holiday. But here, in silence, they ventured into the black emptiness of the filthy train cars.

Jacob now reached the boarding ramp. Frantically, he searched for his

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parents. He moved up the ramp, his left leg screaming with pain as he hobbled. He paused for a moment to look around the depot for his parents. Suddenly, his heart jumped in his chest and began to pound. His eyes opened wide with shock. There they were, moving slowly into the car in front of Jacob's car! He was ecstatic. *I must join them!*

Jacob could not resist the urge and called out to his parents. "Father, mother, I'm here!" They heard him and from the distance he could see their smiles. "We'll see you when the train stops," Moshe called out.

Hanna's smile quickly disappeared, however. She yelled out for Jacob, although she was feeble and he could barely hear her. But what he heard frightened him. She clearly said, "May the Lord bless you and keep you, my only child!"

Jacob was distraught. His mother's words were those of a very famous prayer. It was the blessing that parents give to their children. *Oh, God. No! Do not say that, mother!* Jacob understood that his mother's prayer might be her last words to him. Her prayer was telling him that some great tragedy was about to befall them. Her frail smile belied the significance of the impending disaster, barely causing her lips to curl upward at their edges. Jacob shivered. *Is this train taking my mother to her death? Will we all die?* Then, Jacob shouted as loud as he could. "I love you!" He managed a smile, but doubted if it appeared realistic. He was terribly shaken.

Jacob turned back and attempted to exit the car. He walked two paces towards the ground and was roughly shoved back into his car by a growling German guard. "Get back up in there, Jew-boy!" he screamed at Jacob.

"You don't understand," screamed Jacob in German. "My parents are in the next car up! I must join them!" The guard had no sympathy for Jacob.

"I told you to get back in there!" he shouted. However, Jacob was not to be denied.

"Please," he said to the guard in as pleasant a tone as he could muster, "I want to be with my parents."

The guard took his rifle off of his shoulder. At the same time he said, "And, I want to go home, to Stuttgart! Now get back in!" Suddenly the butt of the guard's rifle was pushing into Jacob's stomach. It happened so fast that he had no time to defend himself. Jacob's stomach cramped and he lost his breath. At the same time, he lost his balance and fell back into the train. Before he could get up, others had entered the car and the heavy doors were closing. By the time that Jacob could pull enough air into his lungs to speak, it was too late. He had been locked in.

The floor of the train car was covered with straw. It stunk with human waste and death. Blood was also on the floor and the walls. The train had been used previously to carry prisoners and the Germans did not bother to clean it. Jacob looked up towards the people inside the train. He then chastised himself for not locating his parents earlier. He felt like a fool for his failure to help them and he was very angry with himself. Despondent, Jacob fell into a corner of the car. Moments later, the train lurched forward and began the long trek to a camp of death. The rocking of the train car soon made him sleepy and Jacob fell into a

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fitful slumber.

He woke up in a huge, silent train depot. He stood upon a boarding ramp, searching for his parents. It was almost impossible to see the people inside the train. His mind was foggy and unclear. *Are my parents inside this car?* Jacob struggled to see the people inside the train. *Where are they?* He was frantic. In front of him was a woman in a long black dress. He saw that there was a white handkerchief tucked into the sleeve of her dress on the right side. Behind the handkerchief was her right hand. But something was wrong with her hand. The hand and each finger was only bone. She had no tendons, muscles or flesh on her hand. Jacob shrieked and stepped back. As he did, he looked up at the woman's face. It was a skull! The old woman's skull looked down at Jacob. In the process, her small, ruffled black hat fell off. The hat drifted unnaturally for a moment in the air before falling to the ramp at Jacob's feet. *Oh my God! What is happening?*

In a panic, Jacob looked around at the other people on the train. They too had skulls for faces. Their hands were also those of skeletons. Jacob's heart was pounding. He tried to turn around and found himself being pushed forward. The skeleton-people were around Jacob, tightly packed. He was unable to move in any direction except inside the train, where more skulls turned their featureless faces towards him. Jacob tried to scream and found that he had no air in his lungs. He had become paralyzed in the center of this crowd of skeletons. Unable to scream, and unable to breathe, Jacob felt faint. He closed his eyes tightly, praying that this horrific sight would somehow disappear. When he opened his eyes, he was still on the train. But now, all of the skull-faces on the train were staring directly at Jacob. An old man, with long white hair on top of his skull-head, raised his hand of bones and touched Jacob on his right shoulder. Jacob jumped back in fear. Then he heard the first words since he had entered the train. The old man's voice said to Jacob, "*You will save many. You must stay alive. At all costs, stay alive!*"

Suddenly there was a loud bang. Instinctively, Jacob flinched, closed his eyes and ducked. He assumed it was a gunshot. But when he opened his eyes, he was back in his train car, on the floor in the corner where he had fallen asleep. Someone had pried a plank of wood loose from the side of the car and it made the banging noise that woke him up. He was on his way from Theresienstadt, in the fetid, crowded car. His parents were in the next car. Jacob prayed for them.

Chapter 37

Rachael's Delivery Dilemma

After Jacob had been taken prisoner, Rachael was forced to go it alone. She had to make decisions for herself and her child that she never expected to make. As the fall of 1942 began to turn into winter, Rachael struggled to keep hope alive. There had been no word about Jacob for months. The partisans had no more contacts inside of the camp. They tried to bribe camp employees to obtain information about Jacob and his parents. But, their attempts failed. Rachael had never felt so alone. She continued to push away Chrusciel's advances, although her advanced state of pregnancy made her less sexually appealing. Still, Chrusciel's adoration of her was obvious. Hershel continued to look after Rachael, as an older brother would. But the time for her delivery was near and decisions had to be made.

One day in late November, Rachael found Chrusciel lounging near a roaring fire. She sat next to him, although with great effort. It seemed as though everything now required great effort. Rachael's body was swollen and she constantly felt the need to urinate. Sitting on the floor had become an ordeal, as was getting back up. She grunted and groaned and finally sat down. They enjoyed the warm fire in silence for several minutes while the baby moved actively. Finally, Rachael spoke. "Do you miss Leon?" Chrusciel gave Rachael a strange and disappointed look. He then sat in silence for several moments before responding.

Leon was Leon Montague, a charter member of Chrusciel's partisans. Leon had been the traitor. As it turned out, Leon hated Jews. His parents were French loyalists, but they taught Leon to fear and despise Jews. The fact that Leon had not met a Jew until Jacob and Rachael had joined the partisans made no difference. He was taught to hate Jews and he had become passionate about it. He had become enraged when Chrusciel allowed the escaping Jews from Theresienstadt to join them.

Chrusciel assumed that when Walter brought in vital information about the Nazi death camps, Leon would have become pacified about Jews. Instead, Leon told others among the partisans that "the Jews were only getting what they deserved." In truth, there was not much love or respect among many of the partisans for Jews. But none of the others tried to harm their new Jewish comrades.

Leon had become enraged when Jacob and Rachael were placed on the Council. He initiated a brief campaign to have all of the Jews removed from the group. When he saw that most of the other partisans had come to respect the escaped Jews, he stopped speaking openly about it. Instead, he decided to arrange for their quick demise. Discovering that several Jews were to participate in the railroad mission, Leon sent an anonymous message to German Field Headquarters in Prague. He gave the Germans every piece of information that he had

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about the mission. Although he was somewhat concerned that Chrusciel might be hurt or captured, his hatred for Jews drove him beyond reason. Besides, he thought in anger, Chrusciel likes the Jews. He is in love with one of them, he thought disgustedly. It was apparent to him that Chrusciel was captivated by the beauty of the Jewess Rachael. To Leon, falling in love with a Jew was a monstrous crime. So, if Chrusciel did not return from the mission, it was no big deal to Leon. In his opinion, Anton no longer deserved to lead the partisans because he loved a Jew. They needed a new leader who would kill the Jews, just like the Germans.

Chrusciel's plan to uncover the traitor had worked perfectly. Chrusciel, who rarely traveled by horseback, did so on that fateful day when he sent his Council members out, each to a different destination, for the next mission. Racing from one destination to the next, Chrusciel searched for embedded German infantry. When he reached the destination assigned to Leon's group, he found almost an entire German company waiting for him. The Germans fired on Chrusciel, but were puzzled by the fact that he was alone. Leon was either not present, or he was hidden from view. Being on horseback, Chrusciel was able to escape unhurt.

Although Leon never returned to the partisans, Chrusciel would not allow this crime to go unpunished. He ordered every partisan to search for Leon. He was to be assassinated on sight.

Chrusciel himself found Leon on a cold and snowy November night in front of a tavern in the town of Baden. He followed Leon into the bar, remaining at a discrete distance. Leon sat next to a small group of men next to the bar. Anton watched as all of the men drank heavily. He moved close enough to hear them discussing the "Jewish problem." The bar was overcrowded and filled with smoke. It was easy for him to remain close to Leon without being discovered.

"I hope the Nazis kill each and every one of those stinking kikes, announced the drunken Leon.

"Those people are out to steal everything they can from honest Christians," said another man at the table.

Then Leon spoke again. Chrusciel edged closer to hear him. "I know about certain death camps in Poland where thousands of Jews are killed and burned every day. The camps are enormous factories for exterminating Jews from Europe." The other men stared at Leon.

Finally, the man next to Leon said, "I hope you are right."

Leon, with a smug expression, said that he had proof. "I know someone who was there, someone who worked there. He told me everything." The men at the table leaned forward as Leon's voice lowered. "They send thousands of Jews to these camps every day by train. The Jews are forced into cattle cars. When they arrive, they are told that they must go into a 'shower room' for 'delousing'. The men are separated from the women and they go into two lines. The children are moved somewhere else. Doctors then look at each person, sending them to the showers or to the barracks. Those that are sent into the showers are told to remove their clothing. They even tell them to tie their shoes together, to make sure they get them back after the shower. Ha, ha ... Isn't that ingenious! Then,

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they send up to two hundred people at a time into the 'shower room.' After they have been locked into the shower room, the job begins." Leon, wanting to take full emotional credit for this mind-boggling story, paused and looked around to see who might be listening.

Chrusciel, who was almost directly behind Leon, quickly pulled his hood up around his head and brought his large beer mug up to cover his face. He did this so quickly, that Leon looked directly at him and failed to recognize him. Having surveyed the people nearby without sensing danger, Leon turned back to his friends and continued.

"When the Jews go into the shower, they think it's really a shower. They have plumbing in the ceiling and showerheads hang from the pipes. It looks real to them. But in a minute or two, the SS drop poison from the roof into the shower room. It's some kind of gas. In a few minutes, everyone in the room is dead! Then, they use huge fans to remove the gas. The Jews that don't get gassed right away are used as forced labor. Later, they burn the bodies."

The men sitting with Leon were stunned into silence. Each of them stared at Leon, with wide eyes and open mouths.

Finally, the man across the table said, "You made that up Leon." The other men joined in, suggesting that it was a myth.

Finally, Leon could stand no more and slammed his fist upon the table. He shouted at his friends, "I told you the truth! The Nazis are killing thousands of Jews there every day!" This brought the attention of everyone on that side of the bar, momentarily. Leon quickly realized that everyone was staring at him and looked down until they stopped.

Trying to regain the advantage, Leon spoke more quietly. "I know someone who worked there and he would not make this up. I also spoke with some Jews who told me that they had heard exactly the same thing from some of their own relatives." As soon as Leon finished that sentence, he realized that he had made a serious mistake.

A small man at the table picked up on it. "What Jews did you speak with Leon? You know some Jews? Who told you this?"

Leon could take no more of this. "Shut up, you idiots! Do you want to get me in trouble?" He was furious. In an effort to entertain his friends, and possibly to increase his stature with them, he had risked his new reputation as a solitary bricklayer who had never been involved with groups of any sort. Leon scanned the bar nervously. "I'm leaving now," he announced to his friends. With that, he turned, found his coat and left the tavern.

Anton followed Leon through the narrow streets and alleys of Baden. They passed crowds of people who were there for the many baths and spas that promised improved health. Finally, they were totally alone in a small dark alley. Anton silently approached Leon and twisted his arms from behind. He held a dagger next to Leon's throat. Leon started to scream and the knife tightened upon his throat. "Who is it? What do you want? Is it money?" Leon was shaking with fear.

Anton allowed Leon to babble in panic for a moment longer. Then he asked Leon a question. "Why do you hate Jews? What have they ever done to

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you?” Leon tried to turn around, but Anton’s hold was solid.

“I know your voice, Anton!” Leon then began to babble about Jews. “They are liars and cheats. Jews are trying to take over Germany and all of Europe. They are vermin and we must eradicate them! What do you care? You are in love with a Jewess. Who are you? You will burn in hell for loving a Jewish bitch.”

Chrusciel checked to make sure that they were still alone. Then he asked, “What have Jews done to you, that you hate them so much?” Leon stopped struggling for a moment. “But everyone knows that they are so rich while we starve and...”

Chrusciel cut him off. “I asked what they did to you, personally.

Leon was confused. “But I was told that...”

Leon was suddenly spun around by Anton’s powerful arms. He continued to hold the knife at Leon’s throat. “Anton!” shouted Leon.

Chrusciel put a hand over Leon’s mouth. In a very low and quiet voice, Chrusciel continued. “You are a traitor to the partisans, to your people and to me. The Jews are an innocent people, blamed unfairly for anything and everything by Nazi propaganda. Some stupid people, like you, actually believe what the Nazis tell you – or even what your stupid parents told you. The Jews that I have known respect others, educate themselves, raise good children and contribute to the betterment of our society, unlike slime like you. You deserve to be starved and beaten, like they are.”

Leon, who was not about to go down without a fight struggled in Chrusciel’s arms, to no avail. Finally, Leon said, “Anton, you are blinded by your love for the Jew bitch.” He opened his mouth to continue speaking when Chrusciel’s dagger pushed sharply into Leon’s throat. A huge pulse of warm blood came out when Anton removed the knife.

Then Anton whispered into Leon’s ear. “I’m not doing this to you because of your hatred of the Jews, although you are a fool to believe that nonsense about them. I am doing this because you are a traitor to the partisans. You have betrayed me, and your actions resulted in the capture of a loyal partisan. I cannot allow a traitor to go unpunished. And, the punishment for such a heinous crime is death.”

Silently, Anton’s dagger sliced again deeply into Leon’s throat. Leon made a deep low gurgling sound. As the knife was removed, a long jet of arterial blood spurting out from the left side of his throat. In the darkness, the blood appeared black, propelled in narrow spurts, arcing through the air to the ground, where it quickly formed a puddle in the snow. Chrusciel backed away to avoid being splattered by the blood. He watched with satisfaction as Leon fell to the ground, grasping his throat in a vain attempt to prevent the blood from vacating his body. He tried to scream, but was unable to, because his throat was filled with blood. He fell into a twitching heap on the snowy street. Anton waited until he was certain that Leon was dead before making the trip back to the partisan’s new home, which was another cave in the same mountain.

On the way back, he thought about Leon’s rude comment about Rachael. He desperately wanted her to love him. Yet, he also recognized that his preoccu-

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pation with Rachael was unhealthy. To some extent, Leon was right. He was not blinded by his love for Rachael. But it was a diversion from his ability to lead the partisans. Chrusciel understood that he and his group were now a significant thorn in the side of the German armed forces. Their disruption of train traffic, destruction of fuel depots and their ever-increasing number of followers was a real threat to the Germans. He had to be more careful than ever before. The Nazis would try to have him assassinated. They would try to infiltrate his group. And, he had to assume that Jacob, under torture, had revealed critical information.

Anton had recently begun to believe that he would not live much longer. Something deep inside made him feel that he would soon be shot. He had to plan carefully, but his love for Rachael could not simply be put aside. On the way back to the cave, Anton tried to devise a plan for Rachael. He was worried about her. Rachael could go into labor soon.

When Rachael woke up on the cold and snowy morning of December 14th, she was told that Chrusciel needed to see her. She rolled over in her sleeping bag, with great discomfort. Rachael's last month of pregnancy had become her worst. Despite eating poorly during her pregnancy, her belly was now huge. Simple tasks like getting up, lying down and sitting had become difficult and very uncomfortable. She now slept near the cave entrance because she frequently had to use the outhouse. Her mood was often foul and she sometimes cursed herself for becoming pregnant. It was the most physically and psychologically demanding part of her life. She continued to fend off Chrusciel's advances and she felt completely lost without Jacob.

Rachael quickly ran a brush through her hair, visited the outhouse for yet another time and found Chrusciel near a small fire in the cave's dark recesses. "You wanted to see me?" asked Rachael. Chrusciel looked up at her. He had been very preoccupied with something. Maps were strewn about, some with drawings and timetables scribbled upon them. When he saw Rachael, his scowl turned into a smile. Of late, Rachael had become more sympathetic to him. She hated his advances toward her. But she could not deny that she was grateful that he loved her. She knew that he would protect her. It was a relief.

"Rachael, yes. I need to speak with you. Chrusciel was almost beaming now, with a wide grin. Please sit down." He motioned to her to sit next to him.

Shyly, Rachael continued to stand. Finally, she admitted that standing might be best for now. "If I sit on the ground next to you, a crane might be needed to get me up again."

They both laughed for a moment. Then, Anton stopped smiling. "Fine, let's begin. You can no longer stay here Rachael. You can deliver any day now. I just can't allow it. Therefore, I have arranged to have you stay with my cousins in Lublin. It's near Krakow. I have someone who will take you in. They will tell the authorities that you are their cousin. But you must take on a name that doesn't sound Jewish. There, you will have your baby in safety and be able to go to a hospital when the time comes." He smiled at Rachael, although he was prepared for an unwelcome response.

Rachael wavered on her feet for a moment. Chrusciel jumped up to catch

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her. "I really think that you need to sit now. Don't worry; I'll bring in a crane for you to get up." Rachael was stunned. She blinked her eyes several times, as though she was attempting to think. At the same time her empty stomach growled and her baby moved awkwardly. She felt dizzy. Chrusciel asked a nearby assistant to bring some food for Rachael.

When she had time to collect her thoughts, Rachael spoke. "I can't leave Jacob and his parents. It's impossible. Besides, if I have a son, he will need to be circumcised after seven days. No... I can't leave here." Chrusciel moved close and put an arm around Rachael's shoulder. She made a move to push him away. However, she was so deep in thought that her move was weak and ineffectual.

Chrusciel then began to whisper in her ear. "My dear, you must now think of your baby's survival more than anything else. We have no doctors or nurses here, much less a Rabbi for a circumcision. What if it becomes a dangerous birth? Rachael, your baby needs to enter the world in a hospital. We are preparing official papers for you now. Walter is doing it. You know how well he can counterfeit German documents. I trust my cousins in Lublin completely. They will be good to you. Everything will be fine, Rachael. Don't worry."

Rachael understood the logic in Chrusciel's argument. Still, she could not bear to be farther away from her beloved Jacob. "Anton, please understand that I cannot be so far away from my husband. I just cannot and will not go. I'm sorry. I know that you want the best for me. But I'm a Jew and I need to be close to my husband. What if he escapes? He won't be able to find me!"

Chrusciel gave this some thought for a while as Rachael ate the food that had been brought for her. Finally, he spoke. "This is what I will do for you, Rachael. I promise to have someone remain close to Jacob and his parents. If they are moved somewhere else, we will follow. If he escapes, we will bring him to you. This I promise, as God is my witness."

Rachael stopped eating and looked up at Chrusciel. Her eyes were wide. "But what about the partisans? How will they go on if you are forced to stay here?"

Chrusciel smiled broadly at Rachael. "Don't worry about that, my dear. I can command my loyal army from almost anywhere – even from prison, if I have to. Rachael, I will stay with you." She finished her meal in silence as Chrusciel frowned and returned to studying his maps.

Later that day, Walter approached Rachael. "Let's go for a walk," he said. As they stepped out of the cave, Rachael noticed that the snow had stopped. But the wind whipped against her skin like sandpaper. Walter motioned her to sit against a very large rock that partially obscured the opening to the cave. He moved close to her. "I'm sorry to put you out here in the cold. I know it's freezing here, but I wanted to be certain that nobody else could hear what I'm about to say. It is essential that no one else know how to reach you, except for Anton and me. Here, take these. He placed three very official-looking papers in her hands. Your new name is Helga Schmidt. You are twenty-two years old and your husband, Josef, was killed fighting for Germany on the Eastern front. You left your home in Dresden to stay with your 'cousins' in Lublin. There, you will deliver your baby in a hospital."

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Rachael looked down and saw a German passport, a German drivers' license with a Dresden address and a travel permit with a Dresden origin. Each document appeared to be perfect. Although Walter had prepared them only the day before, he had folded them, creased them and even spilled tea on the passport, to make them look like they had been used for some time. Rachael could not help but to look back and forth between the counterfeit papers and Walter's face. Finally, Walter roared in laughter. "I'm sorry, but you should see your face right now."

"When do I leave?" she asked Walter. "I've got so much to do. I must find a way to get a message to Jacob, in the camp."

Suddenly, Walter grabbed Rachael's face tightly with both hands. He brought his face close to hers so that they looked in each other's eyes. His hands were strong and very tight. "Rachael, understand me now. This is very important. You must tell no one that you are leaving or where you are going! Do you understand? You must tell no one!"

Rachael thought for a moment about Leon and how he had told the Germans where they could find the partisan's camp. She realized that there could be other traitors among the partisans. Even if they were not traitors, under torture anyone might reveal such information to the Gestapo. Walter was right. She could tell no one where she was going.

Suddenly, she wondered what would happen if Chrusciel was caught. Even if he resisted the torture and told nothing to the Germans, how could he reach her and bring her back to Jacob if he was in prison? Rachael began to feel panic rising inside her. "Walter," she blurted out, "What if Anton is killed or captured? How will I be reunited with Jacob?" Tears were now flowing down her cheeks. "If no one else knows about it, how will we be reunited?"

Walter gently wiped her tears away. This time, he held her face gently with both hands. "Rachael, I promise that I will also look after Jacob. If he is moved, I will move. I will follow him wherever he goes. I promise this to you Rachael. Do you believe me?" Walter's eyes met directly with Rachael's. She could see that Walter meant every word.

"But what if Chrusciel sends you somewhere else? Walter, you are a soldier! Would you disobey a direct order to stay with Jacob?" Walter nodded his head. "Yes, Rachael, I promise that I will stay with him, wherever he goes."

Walter's smile suddenly disappeared. Rachael knew that he was about to say something very important to her. "I will stay with your Jacob and his parents as long as possible. If he escapes, I will bring him to you. But in return, you must promise to make up a history for yourself. You must make up a story that will never change, no matter how many times you tell it. You must be able to describe your entire false background – parents, siblings, schools, clubs, everything. I will give you a map of Dresden. Please study it carefully, especially the neighborhood around your address. If the Germans capture you, you must be able to talk about Dresden as though you really had lived there. Do you understand?"

The thought of being captured again always had made Rachael frightened. Now, she had to assume a new identity. But she was determined to find a safe way for her baby to enter the world. She realized that Chrusciel's plan was her

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best hope. She also understood how much of a commitment Anton and Walter were making. They were both risking their lives for her. It was a very humbling moment. She gently kissed Walter's cheek. "When do I leave?"

Walter looked down at her with a puzzled expression. "That's up to Anton."

On December 18th, Rachael and Chrusciel left the cave for Lublin, a town that she had never heard of before. It took only about five minutes for Rachael to collect all of her belongings. As she waited for Anton near the cave entrance in the snowy cold, she thought about how her life's possessions had been reduced to one small suitcase, filled with a few meager pieces of clothing, a hairbrush, toothbrush, several family pictures, two pictures of her beloved Jacob and her new (false) identity papers. Just two years ago, she lived with all of the material possessions that she had wanted. She owned at least seven formal dresses, dozens of beautiful handmade skirts and blouses and more jewelry than a child probably should have owned. Her father doted on her and Anna, particularly after her mother died. He wanted them to be as beautiful and happy as could be. Rachael recalled how she had chided herself for being too prideful when her clothes were the finest in her school. Whenever girls at school admired her fine clothes and jewelry, she was happy. That is, until she realized that her happiness was a result of false pride. By her fifteenth birthday, Rachael began to tone down her appearance. She did not want anyone to think highly of her simply because she wore expensive items.

Rachael suddenly laughed out loud with the realization that she gone from a life with virtually every material possession that she could have wanted to a life with virtually nothing. People would have to accept her as a person now. Her wealth was gone. She looked up and saw that a sentry who had been observing her now suddenly gave her a disapproving glare. *He probably thinks I'm cracking up!* As she continued to wait, a tear slid out of her left eye and slowly traced a line down her cheek. She was not crying for her lack of clothing or because she was now poor. She was crying because she was suddenly alone in a very frightening and cold world. In less than four years, she had lost her entire immediate family. And though she had found her soul mate in Jacob, he too was now lost to her and in danger of death. She had also come to love Jacob's parents. She particularly loved Jacob's father. He was the most kind and gentle man that she had ever known. And while Moshe could have been aloof because of his wonderful intellect, he was instead modest and unassuming. Rachael often believed that she loved Moshe as much as her own father. The thought of losing Jacob and Moshe, in addition to all of her own family, was too much to bear.

"Don't do that," said Chrusciel. Rachael hadn't even noticed him approach. Now, he bent over to gently wipe the tear from Rachael's cheek. Their eyes met for a moment. As Rachael looked into his eyes, she realized that she had truly developed affection for him. It was not love that she felt, but something akin to a close and meaningful friendship. Or perhaps it was as though he was her brother. She now accepted that Chrusciel was in love with her. It no longer bothered her, as it did when he helped them escape from Theresienstadt. They had settled into a relationship of mutual benefit. Rachael needed someone to care for her until her child was born and she had returned to health. Chrusciel needed to be near

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Rachael. He believed that he would never love another woman as he now loved Rachael. No one in his life was as important.

Rachael realized that they had been looking into each other's eyes for quite some time and quickly broke away. "It's time to go Anton." It's strange, she reflected, that she had somehow begun to call Chrusciel by his first name. In her entire existence with the partisans, covering more than six months, she had heard his first name used only once – and that was from one of his close relatives. Still, she now felt comfortable calling him Anton. It pleased him to no end.

As they climbed into the dilapidated black car that was the only vehicle owned by the partisans, Rachael noticed the crowd of people gathering around the truck. Apparently, all of the partisans came out of the cave to wish them good luck on their journey. Rachael was overwhelmed with the number of people who came to her side of the car to wish her well. In the past few months she had made so many new friends. She loved them all and wished them good luck. Rachael realized that she might never see these people again. *Could I realistically return to the partisans with a newborn baby? Will these people be alive then? How long can a group hunted by the Nazis continue to evade capture? How many would die on missions while I was having my baby?* As the faces appeared outside Rachael's window, she began to cry. She had come to realize that this probably would be the last time she would see them. *I will miss these proud and brave people so much!* She had grown to love them as brothers and sisters. *I am so proud of them.* Tears continued to flow as she reached out and grabbed each person. She hugged and kissed them.

Suddenly, Hershel appeared on her side of the car. As he reached his turn to say good-bye, Rachael could no longer hold her feelings back. She grabbed Hershel by his neck and pulled him against the door of the truck. She wept openly, her chest heaving and pulling air in with large gasps. "Oh God, Hershel, I can't bear to leave you." Rachael thought of the many times that Hershel had helped her, both inside the camp and after their escape. He was truly the wonderful brother that she dreamed of having as a child. In turn, he loved her as a sister and would protect her with his life. How she had come to love his angular face, with its bulbous nose and short black beard. With his curls of long black hair, Hershel had been Rachael's guardian angel since Jacob's capture.

"What will you name the baby?" asked Hershel.

Someone in the crowd behind yelled, "Well it won't be Hershel!" Everyone laughed.

Hershel held Rachael's cheeks between his large hands and kissed her on the forehead. "Don't worry about Jacob. I promise that I will follow him – even if he is moved to another camp. Just worry about your baby. We will know where you are. Remember to keep your new identity until the war is over or until it's safe. You know that I will have you in my thoughts." Then, briefly, Hershel's smile disappeared. His face darkened for a moment, then brightened into a wry smile. He softly whispered to her, "Remember me Rachael." Then he was gone.

"Stay well Hershel," she shouted as the car pulled away. Yet, Rachael could not deny the strong feeling that she would never see him again.

The ride to Lublin was long and dangerous. To make matters worse, a

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winter storm was approaching. They could expect German checkpoints anywhere. Each checkpoint represented grave danger. If their papers appeared suspicious, they would be detained. Chrusciel carried weapons. But they would be of no use against an army checkpoint, which carried a detachment of at least a full patrol.

Rachael looked at Chrusciel for a moment. "How do you plan to go, Anton?" She reflected upon how she now called him by his first name. At first, when they escaped and joined the partisans, she never gave it a thought. That was despite his requests to call him Anton. Everyone called him by his last name and that was the manner in which Rachael addressed him. Somehow, she had finally relented and had begun calling him by his first name. She believed that her heart had softened. After all, any man who continued to flirt with a woman whose body had grown to resemble a tank probably had good intentions. They had somehow arrived at acceptable behaviors with each other. Anton no longer tried to become passionate with her, although it was difficult for him. Rachael slowly allowed a more platonic relationship to flourish. Rachael had even come to realize how difficult it must be for Anton to be so near the woman he loved, and yet unable to be her lover.

Soon after they left, Anton told her about his own forged identity. His name was now "Oleg Braslow," an accountant from Dresden. Rachael, who was now "Helga Schmidt," was his "first cousin" and he was taking her to Lublin where she would stay with relatives. Her "German" husband had been "killed on the Eastern Front" and she was left to fend for herself in life. Walter had somehow obtained actual casualty lists from the Eastern front and used one of the real names, "Corporal Roland Schmidt," for Rachael's "husband." Rachael thought how amazing it was that there really was a man whose wife she now represented. The Germans actually could verify her, well at least her last name. She wondered if the records would include the name of his wife.

Anton shook his head as he drove. "You know, when I get back I really must find out how Walter obtains so many secret German documents." Walter was truly amazing. He could produce almost any type of official German document, as needs required. Then, his thoughts darkened somewhat. Walter must be bribing someone in the German High Command, or at least near it, in order to deliver such information. In a way, he did not want to know what Walter must have done to gain access to such high level material. He looked at Rachael and saw a quizzical look on her face. "Some things are better left uncovered, don't you think Rachael?"

She frowned and softly said, "Or left unsaid."

They drove on to the Northeast as darkness began to fall. The days were very short at this time of year. He looked back at the road with a frown. "To avoid checkpoints, we will only travel on back roads. Unfortunately, that means it will be more uncomfortable and it will take longer to get there." He turned the headlights on as darkness arrived, and then wondered if it would make the car too easy to see. To Anton, danger lurked around every corner.

"Why are you doing this, Anton?" asked Rachael. "How can you be away from the partisans for so long? You could have had someone else drive me. How

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can you risk falling into German hands like this? Are you sure that you are doing the right thing?" But Chrusciel continued to drive on in silence. To him, the answer was obvious. He was so deeply in love with this beautiful young woman that he would have done anything to insure her safety.

They drove through the night, using every back road that appeared on their map. Unfortunately, by morning it was snowing heavily. As the snow intensified, so did the wind. It was soon apparent that they were in the clutches of a major winter storm. The back roads that shielded them from German roadblocks became a dangerous mix of mud, snow and ice. Three times that morning they slid off the road into ditches or onto farmland. Twice they became stuck in snow and mud. Finally, by midday Chrusciel decided that it was impossible to continue to travel on the back roads.

He stopped the car in a town called Sobotka. "Taking the back roads is impossible, for now. We cannot stay anywhere too long because people these days report all unusual travelers to the Gestapo. If they catch us, there's a chance they will see through our false identity papers. Now we will almost certainly have to go through a roadblock. Do you understand?"

With travel impossible, Rachael and Chrusciel checked into the local inn. Chrusciel used the names of their forged identities, in case the local constable became inquisitive. The small hotel was crowded with travelers, also stuck in the storm. They took the only room remaining at the inn. Chrusciel knew that newcomers would attract the attention of local law enforcement. But the crowd of travelers would also be confusing and difficult to process. Still, they were out of the storm and the hotel seemed well stocked with food. It was better than risking their lives on back roads or at a military checkpoint.

They ended up at the hotel for two nights as the winter storm howled outside. Although the tavern was crowded, Rachael and Anton remained to themselves as much as possible. It was risky to speak to anyone for fear that they would be discovered. Capturing partisans would make the career of any local law enforcement officer. So, Rachael and Chrusciel talked endlessly in their room. They shared life stories and past romantic adventures. They had many discussions about Rachael's baby. She thought it would be a boy. He thought it would be a girl. Rachael said that he would be a famous doctor. Chrusciel said that the girl would grow up to be a famous movie star.

During their discussions about the baby, Chrusciel noticed that Rachael sometimes had a distant and sad expression on her face. He wondered deeply about this. *Why would a woman bearing her husband's child be sad about it entering the world? Could Rachael be hiding something from me?* Chrusciel understood that attractive Jewish women were often raped in the camps by German guards. He had heard of some camps in Poland where Jewish women were deliberately impregnated so that German physicians could experiment on them. *What horrors these Nazis inflict upon the innocent! Was Rachael raped in Theresienstadt? Is that why she sometimes stops talking about the baby and seems to drift into another world?*

During lunch on the second day, Rachael sat alone at a table in the hotel's restaurant, waiting for Chrusciel to come down from their room.

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Suddenly, a middle-aged man wearing a fine gray silk suit appeared at the table, holding a drink and a plate of food. Rachael had seen this man in the hotel before, in the lobby, the reading room and the restaurant. Like everyone else, she assumed him to be a stranded traveler. He wore a gold swastika lapel pin. He was thin and balding, with a very thin and short mustache. Smiling slightly, the man bowed his head towards her. "May I join you? The other tables seem to be completely filled." His accent was Bavarian. Glancing around the room, Rachael noted that most of the tables were crowded, if not completely filled. She managed a brief smile and nodded towards a chair on the other side of the table.

"Help yourself," replied Rachael in a quiet voice. Then, somewhat nervously, she said in a louder voice, "I'm waiting for someone." For some reason, this man made her very nervous. Rachael was concerned that he would find flaws in her own Bavarian intonation.

The man slowly sat at the table opposite from Rachael, carefully arranging his silverware, glass of water and his lunch plate. "I've seen you here before. Your husband is upstairs in your room?"

Rachael began to panic. She wasn't certain what to say. If she replied that Chrusciel was her husband, perhaps this man would shut up and mind his own business. If she said "no" he might be alarmed and the situation would require a vast explanation. She didn't know what to do and began to fidget with her fingers. She chose the easiest solution.

"He will be here any minute." She lied because she was terrified of this man and she wanted no further discussion with him. Something about him was dreadful and she wished that she were anywhere else.

Moments later, Chrusciel arrived, to Rachael's significant satisfaction. He also had seen the thin, balding man with a thin mustache in the hotel. Like Rachael, Chrusciel distrusted the man. While the stranger could have been no more threatening than a traveling salesman, something about him was disturbing. Rachael almost jumped out of her chair when Chrusciel drew near. "Anton," she exclaimed. "You're here!" She suddenly realized that she had used Chrusciel's real name. *You stupid idiot! What a terrible spy I am! I cannot even remember to use our false names in public! I am an idiot!*

Chrusciel never missed a beat and turned on a large warm smile. "Helga, I'm sorry to be gone for so long." He then turned his attention to the man sitting across from Rachael. Managing a brief smile, Rachael said weakly, "This is my husband." Chrusciel gave Rachael a strange glance and then introduced himself as "Oleg Braslow."

The man in the silk suit introduced himself as Oscar Restak. He claimed to work for the German Ministry of Propaganda. Chrusciel left to get some food at the buffet. However, Restak continued to stare at Rachael. Finally, he asked, "Have I seen you somewhere before?"

Suddenly, Rachael remembered. She had seen him before! In Theresienstadt, he had appeared one day when Rachael was teaching in the school. He said then that he worked for the Propaganda Ministry and that they were planning to film a movie inside the camp. He was particularly interested in filming inside the school. Rachael suddenly wanted to run away. Her heart leapt into

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her throat and began to pound heavily. *Oh my God, he remembers me!* This man was in a position to inform the Gestapo about her. Without looking up at him, she croaked, "I do not believe that I have seen you before, Herr Restak."

When Chrusciel returned with a plate full of food and sat down, he noticed the man staring at his hands, then at Rachael's. Suddenly, he realized what the man was looking for. Neither of them had a wedding ring. Restak gave them a strange look but said nothing.

Soon, another couple joined them and the table was full. Much small talk followed, much of it related to the storm. But throughout the meal, Rachael felt Restak's cold eyes upon her. "Do you have a sister, Helga?" He was fishing for something. Rachael glanced at Chrusciel, but he was unable to answer for her. After an awkward silence, she looked briefly at Restak and said that she did not have a sister. "Well, that's funny," replied Restak, with a wry smile. "You see, I saw someone a few months ago who looked exactly like you." Rachael had begun to sweat profusely. Her hands began to shake. "Of course," Restak continued, "it could not have been you. You see, I saw that person in a camp for Jews, near Prague. But if you have a twin sister, that's her!" His sly smile made Rachael's skin crawl.

Soon, everyone's conversation had turned to Rachael. The other couple wanted to know how she felt, if the baby kicked her much, if she could still sleep or eat, etc. Rachael hated the attention drawn to her, especially because it gave Restak an opportunity to stare at her longer. Her anxiety was reaching monumental proportions. Finally, she claimed tiredness and returned to their room. She could feel Restak's eyes upon her even as she walked away. Chrusciel told Rachael that he would be up soon. However, he spent the next hour following Restak surreptitiously.

After their lunch, Restak headed for the front desk. When it was clear of people, he bent forward and whispered something to the desk clerk. The clerk argued with Restak for a moment. Then, Restak opened his wallet and gave the clerk a look at some type of official document. The desk clerk's eyes opened wide with fear. Chrusciel wanted to get closer to hear their conversation, but it was impossible. Then, he watched in horror as the desk clerk took the hotel's book containing all of the names and addresses of each current and past guest, and gave it to Restak. Restak then spent several minutes gazing at the names. Suddenly, he turned around. Chrusciel, who was watching from a corner of the room, quickly moved away. *Did Restak see me? Does he know we are not who we seem to be? He must have seen that I did not sign into the inn with the name "Anton." Who is Restak and what is he doing here?*

Chrusciel raced back to their room. He opened the door breathless and frightened. "We must leave now, Rachael. Pack your things as quickly as you can." Rachael looked at him with wide, frightened eyes. "It's Restak, isn't it?"

Chrusciel was now packing his own belongings as fast as he could. "Yes," he replied without looking up. "Restak may be more than he told us about at lunch. Please hurry."

Chapter 38

The Checkpoint

On the afternoon of December 21st, Chrusciel checked out and paid the hotel clerk as rapidly and as discretely as possible. The old desk clerk was stalling, probably at Restak's orders. He fumbled with the papers and excused himself to make a phone call. Anton guessed that the clerk was calling Restak's room. No one answered. The clerk pressed Chrusciel not to leave just yet because the roads were not cleared. However, Anton was already on his way out the huge mahogany front door.

Rachael was already in the car, waiting for him. It was still snowing, but not nearly as hard as it was when they had arrived. She looked at him with large, anxious eyes. "I'm sorry Rachael, but we cannot stay here." He was a little surprised when Rachael said that she knew why.

"Anton, I know him. He was inside Theresienstadt when I was there as a prisoner. He saw me teaching in the school there. That's why he was staring at me. It's my fault, Anton!" She began to weep.

He put his hand on her hand, softly. "No, Rachael, it is not your fault. It's simply bad luck." They rode on in silence.

The main roads were mostly vacant due to the storm. Only military vehicles traveled in such hazardous conditions. The wind continued to howl, driving the snow almost horizontal. Trees were bending and breaking against the blustery weather. At times it was impossible to see. Chrusciel tried to drive in the tracks made by vehicles ahead of them. Occasionally, the car would drift out of the tracks and swerve dangerously. Rachael glanced at him and noticed that he was perspiring heavily. "What's the matter Anton? Why are you sweating?"

Normally, Chrusciel looked at Rachael's face when he spoke to her. But now, he continued to stare at the road ahead. "I'm sorry, Rachael. But, if we swerve off the road and get stuck, we'll be in big trouble. To be honest, I've never driven in snow this deep. And, I am afraid that we will soon be followed"

Just as he completed that sentence, his concentration was lost for a moment. The car swerved to the right and started to fall off the road. Rachael could hear the densely packed snow scraping against the bottom of the car's chassis. Just as abruptly, Chrusciel regained control and brought the vehicle back into the tracks on the road. They smiled at each other as they had again averted a dangerous situation. Suddenly, Chrusciel stopped smiling. The look on his face frightened Rachael. "Anton, what is it?" She looked ahead on the road and saw a German checkpoint. Her heart jumped up in her chest and she was barely able to catch her breath. "Oh my God," whispered Rachael. She looked at Chrusciel and saw the same fear on his face.

Chrusciel gave Rachael a stern glance and began to prepare her for trouble. "Rachael, this could be the Polish border, although I don't see any flags or signs."

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Rachael looked back at him and he could see the fear in her eyes.

“They probably consider Poland to be a part of greater Germany now. That must be why there are no signs. But according to our map, we should be at the border.” He slowed the car to buy time as a large military convoy passed them.

Chrusciel was suddenly filled with apprehension. He was a soldier and soldiers were used to the fear of combat. So, why was he suddenly afraid? He was never really frightened by contact with German soldiers. He had always been confident that he would fool them, or kill them. So, why fear now? Then he realized why. He was in love with Rachael and he was frightened for her welfare. The feeling was strange and it made him uncomfortable. He needed to focus on the mission, especially if there was trouble. There was also something else. Something deep inside told him to go away. For some reason, death was in this place that he was rapidly approaching. He could almost smell it. And while his mind screamed to turn around and try another border crossing, he slowed the car and approached the checkpoint. He ignored his intuition for the first time.

“Rachael, just be calm and remember your story,” he said. “Who are you?” Rachael was suddenly gripped with fear. She had forgotten her false name. *Was it Helen? Was it Helga? Was the last name, “Schmidt?”* “Oh God,” she said in panic. “I think I’ve... uh, I can’t remember!” Rachael’s voice continued to rise inside the car until she was almost screaming.

Chrusciel took his foot off the gas, slowing the vehicle. Then, taking his right hand from the wheel, he placed it on Rachael’s left arm. He spoke firmly and slowly. “Rachael, take the documents out from your handbag and go over them now, please.” He spoke in such a calm and reassuring voice that Rachael was instantly able to focus. She pulled the papers from her handbag and quickly studied them.

In a shaky voice, she croaked, “Oh yes, it’s ‘*Helga*’ Schmidt.” She gave him an uneasy smile and then the car slowed to a stop at the gate.

Two German soldiers stood stoically next to the red and white striped horizontal pole that straddled the highway. The road was closed for inspection. A third German soldier’s legs could be seen from the doorway of the small guard building. It was little more than a small wooden booth. Anton judged that it could accommodate no more than two soldiers, particularly if they had rifles inside.

Anton’s mind raced with alternative actions. He looked carefully at the two guards who were outside of the booth. One was tall and very young. Tufts of blonde hair protruded from his black helmet. He carried a standard-issue single-shot rifle. Underneath his trench coat, Chrusciel noted that he wore a pistol belt. Even from seventy meters, he could see that the young man had strikingly blue eyes. Chrusciel named this one “Bluebell.” The other guard was much older, probably in his fifties. He was slovenly in appearance and looked as though he might have recently been sleeping. Most importantly, he did not seem to be carrying a weapon. Chrusciel named this one “Sleepy.” The third visible German, whose legs only were visible, he named “Shifty.”

“Bluebell” approached the car first and on the driver’s side. “Sleepy trudged along in the snow behind him. Chrusciel felt inside the right pocket of his coat

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for his revolver. His mind continued to race with choices. He had only six bullets in the handgun. Walter encouraged him to take the semi-automatic pistol or one of their stolen machine guns. But Chrusciel refused. If the car was inspected and the Germans found such weapons, they would be arrested. Civilians do not carry automatic weapons. So it would be up to the handgun, if trouble arrived. With four or five guards and only six bullets, Chrusciel would have to make each shot count.

Suddenly, "Bluebell" was knocking on the window on Anton's side. "Open up!" he demanded in an eastern German dialect. Chrusciel deliberately slowed his actions in order to buy more time to think. Bluebell became impatient. He banged against the side of the car with his rifle. Rachael jumped in her seat as though there was a bomb underneath it. But Chrusciel seemed to be somewhere else. He stared forward, almost as if he did not hear the guard. Rachael could hear Bluebell's high-pitched voice through the closed car. "Open up!" shouted Bluebell. "What's the matter with you?"

Rachael put her hands underneath her dress so that the guard would not see that they were trembling. She wondered what sort of game Anton was up to. It seemed dangerous to just sit there. Chrusciel suddenly appeared to break out of his trance. He opened the window and managed a smile for the guard. In his best imitation of a Bavarian accent, Chrusciel stuttered, "I am, um, sorry, sir. Uh, I did not see you there."

By now, Sleepy, who was still trudging through the snow from his station, had moved closer. Rachael suddenly realized that with the storm, very little traffic was likely to be going through the checkpoint. These guards had plenty of time to inspect them and the car. She grew even more frightened. "Let's see your papers," demanded Bluebell on Chrusciel's side of the car. Rachael pretended not to watch as Sleepy approached her side. However, in a moment, Sleepy was knocking on Rachael's window. She opened it half way. But Sleepy continued to knock on the glass until she opened it all the way. Chrusciel noticed that Bluebell had shouldered his rifle, in order to inspect Chrusciel's identity papers. He also reaffirmed that Sleepy did not seem to have a weapon of any kind. Upon closer inspection, he saw a rifle leaning against the guard booth. He sighed in relief. With the element of surprise, he could quickly take out both of these guards – if necessary.

Sleepy demanded Rachael's identity papers. As she handed them over, the guard noticed her hands shaking. "What's wrong, lady?" She gave him a blank look. "Why are your hands shaking like that?" Now the guard on Anton's side was staring at Rachael's hands. She tried to stop them, but her hands had a mind of their own. "Step out of the car," demanded Bluebell, "both of you!" Rachael's heart was now pounding in her chest. She looked at Anton. Suddenly, Bluebell screamed, "Get out now!"

Rachael grabbed at Chrusciel's arm. "Anton, should we get out?" Suddenly, Rachael realized that she had called him by his real name. She caught her breath sharply. *What a fool I am! I've now done it twice!* Now her heart was pounding so hard and so fast that she thought she might faint. She was, in fact, getting very dizzy. Chrusciel gave her a sympathetic glance. "It's all right *Helga*."

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Let's get out. We have nothing to hide.

Chrusciel slipped out the driver's side slowly and quietly. He did not want the guard inside the booth (Shifty) to come out, at least not just yet. He had to find a way to move over to the passenger side of the car. He had to bring Bluebell and Sleepy together.

Suddenly, Chrusciel had an idea. He looked into Bluebell's eyes and said softly, "My wife is nine months pregnant and she needs help to get out of the car." Before waiting for a reply from the Germans, he quickly walked to Rachael's side of the car. Bluebell obediently followed. Anton was successful in bringing the two guards close together. *The young ones can be manipulated, like puppets.* In cooperating, they sealed their death, since Anton could now get off two reliable shots quickly. The guards were now standing side by side on the passenger side of the car. But Chrusciel was still concerned with the booth. Shifty was there and he was probably armed.

Rachael was indeed having trouble exiting the car. In her ninth month of pregnancy, almost all body movement was difficult, at best. It took her almost a minute to squeeze out. Meanwhile, Chrusciel noticed that Shifty had come out from the booth and was now moving in their direction. *Is there another guard inside the station?* Moreover, Chrusciel now saw that Shifty was an officer – a lieutenant. That meant he had more military training. He would be less likely to fall for a ruse and more likely to handle weapons efficiently. He now began to question Bluebell and Sleepy in rapid-fire German. The two guards gave all of the identity papers to Shifty, who began to examine them carefully. The three of them kept their distance and spoke very quietly, occasionally glancing up to frown at Chrusciel and Rachael. Chrusciel could only catch a few words here and there. He pushed his right hand into his coat pocket, grasping the 45-caliber revolver and pushing the safety off. Then, to Chrusciel's dismay, Shifty moved closer.

Shifty stared at Anton as he slowly walked over to them. His boots made soft crunching sounds in the snow. As Shifty walked towards Anton, he placed his right hand upon the handgun strapped to his waist. He stopped, only a few meters away. As he stopped, he pulled away the snap that held the handgun in its leather pouch. *This one is suspicious.* Suddenly, just as he arrived, he lurched over and grabbed Rachael's arm. "Why did you call him Anton?" Shifty demanded.

Rachael's face was as white as the ubiquitous snow. She was trembling uncontrollably and moved to brace herself against the car with her arm. Shifty stared back and forth between Rachael and Chrusciel. Slowly, Chrusciel moved in front of Rachael. At the same time, he said, "It's my nickname."

But Shifty was not impressed with the answer. "You have different last names. How can you be married?"

Anton replied without missing a beat. "We divorced last year and she went back to using her maiden name." The three Germans looked at each other, and then back at the traveling partisans.

Anton felt that the Germans were not buying his explanation. If he were to take action, now would be the time. The three Germans were standing shoulder to shoulder. Three easy shots would do it. If he waited, they would surely move

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apart. Then, the chance of escape would narrow considerably. There was a sudden gust of wind and a nearby tree branch cracked sharply. Everyone looked to the side of the road. Everyone, that is, but Chrusciel. The loud snap of the tree branch happened at precisely the right time for him. The distraction allowed him to take out his gun unnoticed.

In a flash, Chrusciel shoved Rachael down to the ground and pulled his revolver up. For a fraction of a second, Chrusciel saw the looks on the faces of the surprised German soldiers. He shot Shifty first. The bullet pierced his head, instantly killing him. The shot splashed blood, pieces of bone and brains upon Sleepy's face and neck. Sleepy was utterly shocked and remained motionless. He blinked at Chrusciel as the second shot pierced his forehead.

A second later, Anton aimed the revolver at Bluebell, who was attempting to bring his rifle up. However, Chrusciel had positioned the men so close together that there was not enough room for Bluebell to bring the rifle up without moving a step or two backwards. The time required to step back was a tremendous strategic advantage for Chrusciel. By the time Bluebell moved back to bring his rifle up, it was too late. With a loud bang, the top of Bluebell's head flew off. He fell into the snow as a puddle of bright red blood formed in the pristine snow around his head.

Within three seconds, Anton had killed three German guards, including an officer. Suddenly, there was movement near the rifle that had been perched against the white guard booth. As a leg and an arm appeared in the doorway, Anton watched the rifle disappear inside the booth. A moment later, a shot rang out and a puff of smoke drifted out from the guard booth. Chrusciel heard a bullet whiz past him on the left.

Anton's mind raced. *I must kill the remaining guard and keep Rachael safe. And, I must prevent the guard from using the telephone and reporting the attack to his superiors. He could already be on the telephone or radio!* Suddenly, he heard a loud crack and another bullet whizzed past his left ear. This time, the aim was much better. The bullet passed through the passenger window of the car, becoming embedded in the upholstery. Instantly, Chrusciel ran behind the car and moved to the front of the driver's side. Rachael was still crouching on the ground behind the passenger side door. Chrusciel realized that if he was the target, he had better get as far away from Rachael as possible. As he reached the front of the car, another cracking sound and another bullet came his way. This bullet smashed through the left headlight of the car, emerging through the fender, just behind Chrusciel. A yellow fluid began to leak from the engine compartment into the snow under the car.

Another loud crack echoed through the woods. Chrusciel was sprayed by metal and paint, as the bullet bounced off of the hood of the car. The bullet sounded like an enormous mosquito as it sheared off part of his left ear. Blood dripped down his neck, onto his shoulder. He reached up and felt shrapnel in his forehead. *That bullet nearly took my head off!* Although he could hardly see, Chrusciel fired into the booth. He instantly regretted his action, since he now had only two bullets left. *Damn, I knew that I should not have taken the revolver!*

For several moments, there was nothing but silence. *Why is the German so*

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quiet? Why isn't he shooting? Suddenly, Chrusciel realized what was happening. *Of course, he is using the telephone to report the attack.* Anton's mind whirred with ideas. He rapidly reached the conclusion that he had only two logical choices. He could try to shoot the telephone line, coming from the booth to the telephone pole near the road. But the pistol was not an accurate weapon from that distance. Besides, if he failed, he would have no bullets left for the German. *No, that choice is too risky.* He really had no alternate option. *I must attack the German now inside the booth.*

Chrusciel stood up and raced to the guard booth, his shoes pushing white sprays of snow behind each step. He ran faster than he had ever run before. His heart was pounding and his chest was heaving. A stitch of pain stabbed his right rib cage.

Rachael was horrified as she peered around the front of the car to watch. She could not recall ever being so frightened, even when she and Jacob escaped from the camp. *What would happen if I lost Anton? I would be lost! How can I find the safe house on my own?* In the middle of this thought, a severe cramp in her womb brought Rachael to the ground in agonizing pain. She had experienced false labor two or three times during the past month. But this one was different. It was much more painful and it covered much more territory. It seemed as though her entire lower abdomen and the muscles of her womb had joined together in one horrible cramp. The pain was severe and she could barely focus on Anton's ordeal.

Chrusciel raced the distance from the car to the guard booth as fast as he ever ran. He knew that each crunching step upon the snow gave his position to the remaining German guard. As he ran, something happened to him that he had never before experienced. Anton had always felt confident in combat situations. However, he was suddenly overcome by a strong sense of fear. It was the most horrible feeling that he had ever experienced. With each step, Anton felt one step closer to death. He was overcome with grief and sadness, but he ran on. *I must protect Rachael, no matter the cost.*

Anton stormed into the booth, pistol in both hands. Normally, he would have entered with gun blazing. But, with only two bullets, he no longer had that luxury. As he entered, he crouched down and dove to the floor, to become a smaller target.

The booth itself was dark and tiny, with only a wooden floor, two small chairs and a counter against the far wall. The interior walls were not painted and he saw that guards had scribbled messages here and there on the walls. It smelled of smoke and stale beer. He saw empty brown beer bottles on the counter, next to the telephone. Anton looked down and saw that the guard was very young, perhaps less than twenty years old. The young soldier looked up at Chrusciel in abject fear, his brown eyes wide like saucers. Chrusciel prayed that this young man was intoxicated and inexperienced with hand-to-hand combat. He decided to fire at the guard while he was still in the air. Unfortunately, Chrusciel's momentum caused him to crash against the far wall of the booth as he fired, knocking beer bottles, paper and pencils in all directions. The bullet missed the guard, but slammed into the telephone, rendering it useless. *Damn, only one bullet left!*

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The young German guard was sprawled out on the floor, with his rifle in his right hand and the telephone earpiece in his left hand. Chrusciel saw that indeed, the guard had been trying to dial it. *Am I too late?* Static emerged from the telephone earpiece. Suddenly, a bright white flash erupted directly in front of Chrusciel, followed by an enormous explosion. His ears began to ring instantly. But much worse than that, Chrusciel felt something smash into his left upper chest. It was so forceful that he was swept up and off his feet momentarily, then backwards until he fell against the far wall of the guard booth. His chest exploded in warm pain.

The bullet tore through muscle and ripped through Chrusciel's left rib cage, shattering two ribs. It raced through his body, barely missing his heart. The rifle bullet burrowed through his left lung, ripping apart a large artery. Pieces of shattered ribs flew like shrapnel around his chest cavity, tearing into softer tissue and breaking apart blood vessels. It was a devastating injury.

It took a moment for Chrusciel to accept that he had been shot. He was dazed, and he simply sat there for a moment, staring at his opponent. He was unable to see out of his left eye and his ears were still ringing loudly. The left side of his chest felt heavy and warm. When he tried to move, there was severe pain in his left ribs. He found it difficult to breathe. Chrusciel smelled something burning as well. He stared at the young German soldier through a cloud of bluish smoke. He shook his head violently to clear his thoughts and realized that there would be time later to assess the nature of his injuries.

The young German guard was feverishly working on his rifle. It seemed to be jammed and the youngster pulled back on the firing pin in panic. Chrusciel looked down and saw that he was still loosely holding his pistol in his open left hand. He tried to raise it and found that his left arm was disabled. He had to use two hands to bring the gun up and aim it at the German. His hands were shaking, probably from shock. He remembered that there was only one bullet remaining in the gun. Having been shot, he could no longer fight the German hand-to-hand. For a moment, the two men simply stared at each other, the young German still fumbling with his rifle. Chrusciel propped his right leg upon the guard's chest to immobilize him, pulled back upon the trigger and fired.

Flame exploded from the muzzle, followed by a deafening roar as Anton's pistol erupted once more. Unfortunately, because Chrusciel's hands were shaking badly, the bullet missed its target. Instead of hitting the young man's head, the bullet tore into the wall next to the guard's left ear. The smell of gunpowder filled the dark booth. As the two men stared at each other, the telephone suddenly crackled to life. *So, it was not so severely damaged after all!* The German grabbed at the receiver and began stammering.

Chrusciel sprung to life. He grabbed the telephone cord and pulled it out of the wall. At the same time, with great pain, Chrusciel reached his left hand down into his coat pocket and removed a long knife. He transferred the knife to his right hand and jumped on the German. They struggled inside of the booth, rolling and bouncing against the sides. Twice, Chrusciel felt waves of unconsciousness overcoming him. His left hand and arm were very weak and he had to use all of the strength he could muster from his right hand and arm.

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Normally, Chrusciel could have killed this inexperienced guard in just a few seconds, and silently. But Anton was badly hurt. Many of his hand-to-hand combat techniques were now useless. So, he decided to use gravity to help him kill the guard. He managed to bring himself on top of the German. Then, he placed his right hand, with the knife pointing straight down directly under the middle of his body. As Chrusciel lowered himself onto the German's body, the weight of his own body helped push the knife in deeper. Somehow, he managed to find enough strength to push the knife deep into the guard's chest. At almost the same time that the guard died, Anton fell into a stupor.

Chrusciel woke up inside the racing car. He was in terrible pain and gasping for breath. Rachael was putting something on the left side of his face and head. His ears were still ringing. He looked down and saw that he was covered with bright red blood. He tried to speak and found that he couldn't. The left side of his chest felt heavy and it was difficult to breathe. He felt an overpowering need to cough. Anton tried to stifle it, but he soon began to cough violently, bringing up a huge amount of bright red blood. Dreadful thoughts raced across his darkening mind. *I am going to die!* Rachael gave him her white handkerchief to use. In a moment, the white handkerchief was completely soaked with blood. He wondered absently how much healthy lung tissue remained.

Anton now understood that his feeling of doom while running towards the guard booth was a premonition. It had come true. Chrusciel was a warrior and a soldier. He understood and accepted that soldiers die in battle. Therefore, while he was afraid to die, it was not unexpected. He had prepared himself for death on many occasions. If this was to be his time, he would accept it as a soldier should. His worry was for Rachael. *My job is to protect her. What will happen to her when I am gone?*

Rachael was on the verge of hysteria. Tears streamed down her cheeks and her hands trembled uncontrollably upon the large steering wheel. Anton stared at her lovingly. She was not prepared for his death. He even dared to believe that in some way, she loved him. He then realized that it was his duty to help Rachael reach safety. He had promised as much. He sat up inside the car, although the action was very painful. He put his hand on the left side of his head. It came away filled with blood, pieces of tissue and hair. He stared at it with disbelief. Then he looked at Rachael.

After a lengthy struggle, Rachael was able to speak. "The rifle must have gone off right next to you. The left side of your face and the left side of your head were damaged." Anton pulled the rear-view mirror over and stared aghast at his reflection. He had an enormous powder burn from the rifle. It covered the entire left side of his head and face. Most of the hair on the left side of his head had been burned off. Only stubble remained where his thick, dark hair once was. His scalp was lacerated in dozens of places and was now raw and open. Blood continued to seep out and drip down onto his neck and shoulders. His left ear was half gone. His left eye was covered by clotted blood. He could only see through his right eye, but it was enough to give him shivers. He wiped the blood away from his face. After wiping dried blood from his eye, Anton noticed that the cornea of his left eye was no longer white. It oozed blood. Chrusciel looked like

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a character from someone's worst nightmare.

Again, Anton tried to speak, but nothing came out. He was unable to bring in enough air and force it back across his vocal cords to speak. Despite the road noise, he was able to hear air escape through the hole in his chest. He whispered hoarsely to Rachael. "Let's keep moving. The guard might have gotten a message through. We must stay on the move. I'm sorry, but it looks like you will have to do the driving now." Anton was suddenly overcome by darkness and passed out.

Rachael drove for hours despite the perilous road conditions. She passed through small towns called Vilna, Karin and Sorry. During this time, Chrusciel remained unconscious. They stopped for petrol near Sorry. The station owner saw Chrusciel slumped inside with his face smashed against the window. Blood was running out from his nose and down across his mouth. He looked back and forth between Rachael and Chrusciel. She felt certain that the station owner would contact the police. Anton looked very bad. She told the attendant that their car went off the road and that he was injured. From the look on his face, it was apparent that he did not believe her.

Rachael drove on for a few miles past the petrol station and then pulled over. She tried desperately to revive Chrusciel. "Anton, please wake up. Please, I beg you. Please wake up!" Rachael threw snow against his face with no luck. *Dear God, I do not know what to do! At least he is still breathing. But, how much blood can a person lose before they die?* With each breath, small red bubbles appeared at the end of his nose. The blood was bright red. *It is arterial blood! Oh my God. What should I do?* She watched helplessly as his labored breathing continued. The red bubbles became large when he exhaled and finally burst, sending a small spray of blood in every direction. This continued with each breath. When she opened his coat to examine the wound, she heard the gurgling chest sounds. Rachael suddenly became very nauseous. Blood was everywhere. "Oh my God, my God, my God," Rachael stammered. "What can I do?" *I must find a way to stop the bleeding!*

Chrusciel's dark suit and overcoat had concealed a huge amount of lost blood. His white dress shirt was completely soaked with blood, as was his white undershirt. Rachael tore the undershirt open and screamed again. She found a circular opening in Chrusciel's chest almost an inch in diameter. Rachael was not prepared for the site of an active, open chest wound. With great effort, she turned him over and saw the only good news. There was an exit wound on his back, just under the left shoulder blade. However, each time that Anton inhaled, air rushed into his chest through the bullet hole. When he exhaled, a mist of air and bright blood came sputtering out. The gurgling sound of the chest wound made Rachael sick to her stomach. She noticed that tiny pieces of lung tissue and small blood clots came up from the wound and splattered upon his chest. She retched and almost vomited. *Oh God, I cannot deal with this!* She barely managed to force her rotund body from the car when the contents of her stomach arced out onto the fresh white snow. She fell upon the ground next to the car, just as the next contraction hit.

Rachael sat in the snow next to the car for a moment, attempting to collect

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herself. She was light-headed, dizzy and the world seemed to be spinning around her. A gloss of perspiration and oil formed a glaze upon her forehead. *How could this be happening to me? What should I do? If I take Anton to a hospital, they will report that he had been shot. The Germans will correlate that report with the checkpoint shooting and have both of us arrested. If I don't take him to a hospital, he will certainly die!* She began to cry. Just three years ago she was the spoiled daughter of a well-known doctor in Salzburg. She was in love and planning for university. The world belonged to Rachael and Jacob. Now, she was lying in a pile of snow, nine months pregnant, separated from her husband and threatened by Germans for participating with the partisans (or just for being Jewish). She sat upon this strange road, in a strange place, with her close friend near death inside the car. It was all too much for her mind to grasp. She screamed in anguish.

Then, just when Rachael thought that her life could get no worse – it did. Suddenly, an enormous jolt of searing pain ran from her groin across her entire abdomen. It was a searing, piercing cramp, unlike anything she had experienced in the past. Rachael had never felt her muscles lock up in such tremendous force. For several moments she could do nothing but scream and hold her abdomen. The pain then subsided. But she knew that it would soon return with a vengeance.

Thoughts raced across Rachael's mind furiously. She remained a moment longer, trying to catch her breath and collect her thoughts. *Will I have to deliver my own child? Can I reach a hospital? What should I do for Anton?* As Rachael climbed back into the car, she noticed that Anton was not moving. His eyes were open, but he seemed to be staring blankly out the car's window. *Oh my dear, sweet Lord. Please do not let him die!*

With trepidation, Rachael moved over to Anton and pulled his coat open, revealing the chest wound. She took in her breath quickly, releasing a squeaking sound. The chest wound that had only a few minutes ago been gurgling and pushing sprays of blood out from his chest was now eerily quiet. She moved closer to Chrusciel's face. "Anton, wake up. Anton. Please wake up!" She shook him violently. "Anton, please, please wake up. I can't go on without you."

Rachael was now sobbing, the tears forming clear vertical lines down her dirt-streaked face. She wanted to place her ear upon his chest to listen for his heartbeat. But, his chest was covered with blood and she couldn't bear to put the side of her face into it. Suddenly, she had an idea. She scrambled to reach her purse and dumped the contents on the front seat. In a moment she produced a small make up mirror. With shaking hands, Rachael placed the mirror under Chrusciel's nose. "Anton!" she screamed at him. She had to hold the mirror with both hands because she was shaking so badly. She saw nothing. There was no sign of breath at all. Then, suddenly, a very small circle of mist gathered upon the corner of the mirror next to his nostril. *He is breathing!* She grabbed his arm to check his pulse at the wrist. His pulse was there, although it was very weak and erratic. It was then that she saw that Anton was holding something. It was a light brown envelope that had been torn apart and folded back together.

Chrusciel was nearly dead. Rachael cried harder than she had at any other

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time in her life. Tears streamed down her face, onto her coat and dress. She looked down again and saw the envelope. She pried it from his hand. Opening the light brown paper, she saw that it contained nothing but an address. It simply said, "1512 Alga Street, #202, Lublin". *It must be our destination! What else could it be? The last thing that Anton must have done before falling unconscious was to remove the address and make sure that I would find it.* After continuing to cry for a long time, Rachael fell into a half-sleep. The wind whistled around the parked car.

Rachael began to dream. In her dream, she and Jacob were standing on that familiar windy mountainside in bright sunlight. The valley below was green on one side and wasteland sand on the other, divided through the middle by one lonely highway. In the distance, on the green side, was a small village. They were on a picnic with their son, who looked to be about four or five years old. The boy resembled her. Black curly ringlets surrounded a beautiful face that also contained some of Jacob's facial features. He ran around them in circles, chattering, smiling and carrying a small blue and white kite. The tail of the kite was whipped up by the wind as he continued to run. He screamed in joy at them. Rachael looked at Jacob. His eyes told her how much they were still in love. They stopped and kissed passionately. Rachael felt something pulling upon her dress. She looked down into the blue eyes of her son, who looked so much like her and Jacob. He compelled them to continue walking. They held hands as they walked under a cloudless deep azure sky. The sunlight warmed their backs. As Rachael looked back and up towards Jacob, she saw that artillery and tanks were lined up on top of the mountain. The muzzles of the artillery were aimed directly down at a small village on the green side of the valley.

Suddenly, Rachael was startled awake by a very loud horn, as a truck passed her car on the snowy highway. The truck kicked up a huge amount of slush from the road and deposited it upon her car. *Oh God no!* She was back in Poland, pregnant and without her husband. Her best friend lay near death next to her in the car and she had no safe place to go. She was startled by how her dream differed from the real world. *Where were we in that dream? Is it a place where we are destined to live? It was so beautiful!* She started the car and began to drive. Tears ran down her cheeks as Rachael stared ahead, the windshield wipers removing a light mixture of snow and rain as the car raced on. She looked back at Chrusciel, who remained slumped against the passenger door. *He gave his life for me!*

As she put the car in gear, Rachael had the strangest experience of her life. Another hard cramp was forming, rising up through the walls of her lower abdomen. This was her third such cramp since they began, about an hour earlier. Suddenly, there was a strong gush of warm water going down her legs and onto the floor of the car. At first, Rachael checked to make sure that the door was closed. But the water that was still dribbling down her legs was *warm*. Her confused mind continued to wander. *Could I have suddenly lost control of my bladder?* But there was so *much* of it. Finally, Rachael understood that her water had broken and she was about to give birth. This thought, enticing as it might have been for someone who was nine month's pregnant, also made Rachael

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realize that she now had only a matter of minutes before hard labor would begin. She was suddenly determined that her child would not be born in an old, decrepit Citroen.

Rachael realized that she had to get Chrusciel help immediately, if he wasn't already dead. After driving several miles, Rachael saw a stand of tall trees and a small farm house on the right side. She slowed the car and then cautiously moved it off the road and onto the drive leading to the house. The car swerved and skidded on the snow-covered gravel as it left the driveway. She could hear corn stalks scraping along the chassis of the car. Suddenly, the car hit a large area of ice. Rachael tried to control the vehicle, but it was impossible. She screamed as the car began to spin uncontrollably. Rachael was smashed against the side of the car. The left side of her head struck the window so hard that the glass broke, forming spider-web lines in every direction. The back of the car crashed into something large and the engine stalled.

Rachael paused for a moment. Her breath came in raspy gulps of air. Her heart was pounding so hard in her chest that it was painful. She grasped her sternum, but the chest pain did not diminish. Rachael needed to see what she had run into, as the car had careened helplessly across the field. She decided to get out of the car. As she opened the door, she was struck by another enormous cramp. This one doubled her over and she fell out of the car onto the ground. Screaming, Rachael rolled on top of broken, dead corn stalks. Hair, snow and bits of dirt covered her face. The pain was tremendous. It frightened her. *Could something be wrong? Am I having a difficult delivery?* After a few more minutes, the pain began to subside. Rachael remained on the frozen ground. She was tired to her bones. All she wanted to do was sleep or die. As she was drifting off, she realized that if she fell asleep here, she and her baby would die. *I cannot allow my baby to die! I owe it to Jacob!* This new motivation gave her the momentum to get up.

With great effort, Rachael stood up. Looking around, she saw that she was close to the front porch of the small house. She observed smoke coming from the chimney. *Someone is home here!* The wind whipped across the field, driving stinging snow and sleet into her face. There was no sound, except the howling wind. Rachael trudged around the front of the car and opened the passenger door. She grabbed Chrusciel's legs and tried to pull his body from the car. But, he was too heavy. Rachael pulled as hard as she could. With all of her strength, she could barely manage to pull his body a few inches at a time. After great effort, Rachael pulled Chrusciel's legs out. She tried again and fell backwards, onto the ground and into the wet snow. She drove herself again to get up and try harder. This time, she managed to get his hips out. As she made another try, she was again hit with a massive cramp. This time, she could actually feel the baby moving down. Screaming, Rachael got up and pulled as hard as she could. Anton's body inched out of the car. She pulled again and fell down again.

Lying in the snow, each breath was like fire in her lungs. Her heart was pounding so hard that she felt it would certainly burst through her chest at any moment. *Is this it? Am I to die here?* Rachael's mind was spinning. She had no more strength to bring Chrusciel out. She even lacked the strength to sit up. This

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was to be her end. Rachael accepted that she would die here, underneath the tall trees on the edge of a frozen cornfield somewhere in southern Poland. A couple of years ago, the world belonged to her, Rachael thought. Now, she was dying alone hundreds of miles from home. She began to sob.

Lying there, Rachael remembered the dream that she had only an hour earlier in the car. She was on that beautiful mountainside, with Jacob and their son. Suddenly, she realized that she had the responsibility to insure that future. *I must try again! I am not only responsible for myself, but now also for my child.* While she might have allowed herself to die here in this strange place, she could not allow her child to die as well. She had to get up, no matter how hard it was. She had to continue, if not for herself or for Jacob, then for her child. With each movement, agonizing pain erupted from Rachael's neck. The accident had damaged something in her spine and each movement caused enormous pain. Somehow, she managed to stand up and pull one more time. This time, Chrusciel's body came out. His head would have hit the ground hard, except for the cushion of a snow bank.

Rachael pulled Chrusciel's body as far as possible towards the house. She knew that it was a miserable effort, but it was all that her damaged body could manage. Just as she was about to say something to Anton, another wave of cramps overwhelmed her. She dropped to the ground and rolled around in agony. Again, she felt the baby moving down in her uterus. She knew that she didn't have much time. She closed her eyes tightly and bore the enormous pain in silence. Looking up at the gray sky, the world seemed to fade away. Snowflakes drifted lazily onto her face, mingling with her tears. "No," she told herself. *I will not allow this to happen.* She slapped her face sharply and threw snow upon it. The pain was horribly intense. Finally, the cramp abated. Rachael stood up and walked to the front porch of the house. She knocked upon the door with all of her might. She then walked back to the car. On the way, she stooped down over Chrusciel's body and wept. "Oh, God, Anton. I owe you so much. I cannot love you the way that I love Jacob. But, Anton, I love what you have done for me, and for my child. If I survive, and if I have a son, I swear that I will name him for you. Good-bye, Anton – hero of the partisans! And, thank you!" Her tears fell upon Chrusciel's cold, white face.

Rachael climbed back into the car. She wondered how much damage was caused by the crash. As she turned the key in the ignition, she prayed that it would operate. The engine made a horrible scraping sound and would not start. She tried again, with the same result. She tried a third time. Again, the car would not start. Rachael sank back into the seat and sobbed. *So, my life will end here. How tragic.* Her love for Jacob was the most wonderful part of her short life. Tears streamed down her cheeks. While she regretted missing the life that she and Jacob could have had together, she cried now mostly for her unborn child. Soon, her body temperature would drop lower and lower, until she was dead. Even if she managed to give birth to her child, it too would soon die from the cold.

Rachael drifted in between moments of sleep. She wanted to be asleep when death arrived. Before falling asleep, Rachael heard a child's voice. The

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voice said, "Try again." Heart pounding, she swiveled in her seat, looking desperately for the child whose voice she heard. "But, this is absurd," muttered Rachael in the silent car. "Nobody is here," she maintained. Then, the voice appeared again. This time, she realized that it was inside her head. "Try again," it said. *I must be hallucinating! What is happening to me?*

Rachael brought her trembling, frozen fingers to the ignition key once more. As she did, she prayed. Her fingers were so numb that she could barely feel the key that she was touching. Her legs and feet felt like blocks of ice. She was wavering on the edge of consciousness. The world was turning gray. Somehow, she summoned enough strength to turn the key one final time. *Dear God, please start the car! I beg of you, please start!* As she turned the key, the car made a deep scraping sound, as it had before. But this time it was followed by what seemed to be an explosion. The car backfired and the engine jumped to life. Rachael screamed with excitement. "Perhaps my baby and I will live beyond today!" she screamed.

Rachael put her foot on the accelerator and the engine growled. There was a loud scraping sound as she put the car into gear. She gently pulled back on the clutch. The car lurched forward. It spun around in a circle when it hit the patch of ice that caused it to smash into the trees. This time, however, the car found some traction and it raced towards the road, gathering speed along the way. Looking up into her rearview mirror, she saw that the house door was opening and a man was walking out. *Perhaps Anton will live.* It was now up to the goodwill of the people in the house.

Large thick snowflakes flew past the windshield, like stars flying across a dark sky. As the car almost reached the road, Rachael saw a truck with German Army signs on it racing down the highway. Her car was now moving swiftly towards that truck at high speed. Rachael applied the brakes, to no avail. The car continued in the same direction, skidding now with the brakes on. Impact seemed inevitable. *Dear God, don't let us hit!* Her car skidded into the road a split second after the German truck had passed. Fortunately, the Germans seemed to be more interested in moving ahead at great speed than they were in why some car was careening towards them from a field. She heard their horn blaring as she pulled in behind the speeding truck.

With the car now back on the highway and headed towards Lublin, Rachael felt a wave of relief. She drove past several small villages at breakneck speed. There were additional waves of contractions, each worse in intensity than the prior contraction. The birth of her child was imminent. She finally saw a sign that said, "Krakow, 4 KM." A moment later, Rachael was hit with the worst contraction of all. The pain was incredible. She grasped her swollen belly in agony. As she did, the world became gray, soft and silent. Perspiration was flowing down from her scalp and into her eyes. She could no longer see the road. For a moment before the crash, she thought that she could see a house. The car went into a long skid and turned completely around before finally impaling a huge tree. Rachael was consumed by darkness.

Chapter 39

A Train To Poland

Jacob lay upon the floor, sleeping. Under closed lids, his eyes were darting in all directions. His heart rate picked up, as did his respiration. Beads of perspiration appeared upon his forehead. His mind was delighting in a dream. It was a repeat of the dream that he had been having since arriving at Theresienstadt. He and Rachael were upon that same beautiful mountainside with their son. Below was the same strange valley, green on one side and brown on the other. There was a cool breeze upon his back, but warm sunlight in front. He was helping his playful son fly a white and blue kite. They were tying a new tail onto the kite when he felt someone pushing him.

Suddenly, he was awake in the foul-smelling train. It was March 17, 1943. Four men squeezed against him on all sides. The smell of putrefied human waste and rotting corpses filled his lungs. He retched as he was again a prisoner of the Nazis. As his mind cleared from the dream, he realized that he and his family had been expelled from Theresienstadt. The surviving Salzburg Jews were now in a fetid train, speeding to an unknown destination. Where were the Nazis taking them?

Jacob looked around at the people crowded into the train car. Drops of perspiration fell into his eyes. In the background, he heard the sound of the train rolling across the European countryside. The Salzburg Jews appeared completely defeated. They stared into emptiness as the train swayed from side to side. They brought suitcases, backpacks, boxes and wagons. These poor, helpless people carried their keepsakes with them, hoping that the Germans would allow them to live. What else would one do with pictures of deceased relatives? What else would one do with artwork and precious jewels inherited from loved ones? What else would one do with the simple and mundane objects that people revere, the trappings of our familial journey through life? Inside of the suitcases were treasured heirlooms of all kinds, formal clothing, Bibles, Torahs, Menorahs, Mezuzahs and every important item that had been passed along by their parents and grandparents. They carried their most precious items along with their fears and doubts.

The train pulled into a depot of a Czech town called Ostrava on March 18th. While it was being refueled, the prisoners were allowed to come out briefly. As Jacob walked out of the train, he saw that his father was looking for him. To yell out for him would invite a beating from the Germans, who constantly demanded silence from their prisoners. The prisoners were allowed to walk in a slow circle near their car. So, Jacob walked very slowly and continued to stare at the group to his left. Finally, Moshe saw Jacob and they were much closer. For a moment, their eyes met and it warmed Jacob's heart. They smiled at each other and nodded their heads.

Jacob had apparently slowed too much and suddenly a whip struck his

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shoulder. It stung badly. But it was well worth it for the chance to see his father. But, his father's appearance bothered him greatly. *Dear God! He looked terrible! His white beard! His wrinkled skin! He looked white as a ghost! Oh, God. Please do not let him die! Please do not let him die!* When they had to enter their separate cattle cars, their eyes were together one final time. Moshe offered Jacob a warm and tender smile. It was the most gentle and sincere smile that Jacob had ever seen. Inside that smile, inside Moshe's eyes, was the pure, gentle soul of a tremendously intelligent and wise person. *Oh God, I love him so!* As Jacob climbed into the putrid cattle car, he thought in amazement how much his life had changed in the last three years. He had gone from prosperity to poverty, from freedom to prison and finally, the Nazis had reduced him to a non-person. Jews were nothing now in Europe. He had no idea how many Jews had already been killed by the Nazis. But those left alive were reduced to forced labor, building the Nazi war machine.

As the doors of the cattle car closed, Jacob thought of Rachael. *Is she still alive? If so, where is she? What does our child look like?* The train lurched forward and Jacob's cattle car thumped into motion. He made a promise to himself. *No matter what the Nazis do to me, I will continue to live. And with every breath I take and all of my remaining power, I will block the Nazis and their terror.* Jacob did not know what he could do to damage the Germans. But he swore to himself that before he died, he would find a way to hurt them, to help his parents and to aid his people. He remembered the story that his father told him about seeing an angel when his village was attacked. The angel told him, "Yours will save many." *Do I have a destiny?*

The train moved east, through the Czech countryside. For hours, the cattle car lurched back and forth. They passed through cities, large and small; as well as tiny villages and the ubiquitous farmland. Sometimes they passed people going to and from their daily chores. Most of the adults gazed upon the train with ambivalence. Some of them shook their heads, as if in despair.

On one occasion, near a small village, Jacob saw a group of children staring at the slowly passing train. Two boys smiled at the train while crossing their thumbs horizontally along their necks. Jacob was taken aback by the sight. Clearly, these children understood that the Jews packed inside of the cattle cars were on their way to a place of their death. The act of slitting their throats could mean nothing else. Jacob could not stop thinking about it. If children were aware that trainloads of Jews were being sent to a camp where they would be killed, then adults surely knew about it. And, if the adults did nothing to stop the killing, then who would? Jacob now understood the critical importance of telling the world about the death camps. His mind was active with ideas. *Somehow, I must collect information about the death camps. I must provide proof to the world. If governments in the free world learn what is happening to us, they must certainly come to our aid! I must dedicate myself to this task. Our lives may depend upon its success.*

Inside the repulsive train, Jacob and the other Salzburg Jews stood tightly packed together. Two cattle cars had been removed from the train at Ostrava, apparently for mechanical reasons. The occupants of those cars had been added

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to the other cars, including Jacob's cattle car. Now, there was no room at all for people to sit. With each rattle and shake of the train, Jacob received a stabbing pain from his left knee. It was sore when he entered the train, but after four hours of constant standing, it began to shoot massive bolts of searing pain. It soon felt as though his entire leg was pulsing with pain.

Jacob pushed and shoved in an effort to find space on a wall. If he could only lean against something solid, he could reduce the pain in his leg. He angered several people, one of whom punched Jacob in the shoulder. Finally, he found a small space in the far back of the car. He was surprised to see a large rectangular hole about eight inches over his eye level. But by standing on a small edge of wood just above the bottom of the wall, Jacob could see outside.

For hours, Jacob observed the passing countryside from his small rectangular opening. The train had traveled all night and it was now early morning. Everyone in the train car was guessing where the train was headed. They were heading east – always east. The consensus was central Poland. If the train stopped at another station, someone would see the sign. Jacob heard many of his fellow passengers say the name “Krakow.” Would that be the train's final destination? *My mother has family there. Yes, that was where we visited Aunt Goldie and Uncle David! But, the last letter that we received from them indicated that they were being sent to a ghetto in Warsaw.*

Most of the men still believed that they were more valuable to the Germans alive than dead. The vast majority of Jacob's current comrades had already been working in an ammunition factory near Theresienstadt. It was generally accepted that the Germans would rather have them working than dead. Some Jews believed that once the war was over, they would all be released.

The train rambled on for another day and the guessing game continued. Each time the train stopped, Jacob would look out through his small portal to tell the group where they were. They had recently stopped for water and coal at Lodz and now it was slowing again, coming into the depot at Krakow. Someone on the train said it that they were about 70 km south of Warsaw. Again, the train stopped for fuel and water. Again, the doors holding Jacob and the prisoners remained locked. They continued on, in a cold rain. They passed towns called Karvina, Zory and Ruda. Nobody knew the destination, but it seemed that everyone had an opinion. Some said Warsaw. Others were certain that they would turn west and head into Germany.

The train stopped twice more. However, the interred Jews were not allowed out from their rank cattle cars. Many of the older and frail prisoners had passed out. A few had died. Many people simply balanced against each other or against the side of the car. Others managed to slither their way to the floor of the train. The Germans gave each train car two buckets for lavatory use. But after eighteen hours, the buckets were overflowing. The straw on the floor of the car had become fouled with feces, vomit and urine. The car was now horribly fetid, despite cold air rushing through small holes and cracks in the sides. Everyone covered their mouths with handkerchiefs or clothing to try to keep the odor away. Some people were vomiting from the smell, contributing to the problem. By the time the door was finally opened, the cattle car was a dank, foul disgusting mass

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of living, barely living and dead Jews.

In the station at Krakow, there was a passenger train on the next parallel track inside of the depot. The two trains were parked next to each other, so that people in the passenger train could see the faces, arms and hands sticking out of the cattle cars of Jacob's train. The other train was heading south, to Vienna, according to a sign posted in a passenger compartment. Jacob imagined what it would be like to be on that other train. He dreamed of how it would feel. *They are going to Austria! I'd give anything to be on that train right now. Yes, on to Vienna and then to Salzburg!* Jacob dreamed on about being home again. Then, with a sudden grudging finality, he realized that he no longer had a home there. *Someone else lives there now! Someone else lives in my home.* That thought made Jacob more depressed than ever. *What right do they have to take our home?*

Jacob saw the passengers on the other train clearly, behind glass windows. The train was filled with women, children and a few old people. There were men in business suits with briefcases and a few soldiers. Most of the passengers wore their best traveling clothes, many of the women in fur coats. The children jumped about, chattering and playing games. Some pointed out the windows at Jacob's train. A few of the windows were open. The epiphany of the moment was not lost upon Jacob's reeling mind. He saw well-heeled families and businessmen through the windows of the other train. *People are happily going on with their lives, oblivious to the pain and suffering in here.*

Jacob yelled at the passengers on the other train. "In here! Help us! We're being taken away to rot in prison or die!" Jacob paused for a moment. He was out of breath and astonished at his own behavior. He had no more intention of yelling to passengers on the other train than he had asking them for the time of day. But there it was. He had yelled at them. And by their reactions, many of them had heard him. He saw faces with an expression of astonishment. Children who were playing near open windows now stared blankly at Jacob's train. From their perspective, the decrepit train stopped next to them had thousands of hands, fingers, feet and a few faces peeking out through cracks and holes. No doubt, thought Jacob, they were trying to figure out which window the sound came from. Jacob yelled at them again. "What do you Germans think of us, locked into cattle cars? Do you care? Do you understand our suffering? We are here! We are human beings! How do you feel about what your government is doing to us? Why don't you care?"

Astonished by his own behavior, Jacob continued, as though he was driven to announce his people's presence to the passengers in the next train. "Help us!" he screamed. Again, many of the passengers looked out the windows towards Jacob's train in puzzlement. Jacob drew as much air as possible, releasing a prodigious yell, "We're being taken to our deaths here. Please help us!" Everyone stared at Jacob in astonished silence. And as Jacob drew breath to continue, something amazing happened. Everyone else on Jacob's train began to yell at the passengers on the other train. The look of surprise that Jacob had seen with his earlier episode of screaming had changed. It had been replaced with a look of fear. *This might be our last chance to cry out for help!*

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German guards now walked alongside Jacob's train, shouting and banging their rifles against the sides of the cattle cars. They were screaming at the prisoners to stop yelling at the passengers on the train next to them. It did not help. The shouting continued, until one of the German officers fired his pistol into the air. The yelling stopped. Moments later, with a shudder and jerk, Jacob's train was moving. The passengers of both trains stared at each other until the train had left the station. Jacob wondered if he would see freedom again.

The train continued slowly in an easterly direction for hours. They passed vast areas of countryside, broken by the occasional road, village or town. The train regularly passed people who were outside for various reasons. They saw children going to or from school, people on their way to work or home and people repairing their property. The vast majority of these people ignored the train. Some of those who looked at the train immediately looked down and shook their heads, as if in sorrow. Jacob observed this with increasing trepidation. He was not the only one to observe the reactions of the sad farmers. There was much muttering and grumbling and exchange of opinions. The farther they traveled, the more frightened people became. Some said that they would refuse to get off at the final destination. *Where are they taking us? Why do those people feel sorry for us? What's going to happen?*

Finally, in the middle of a freezing, snowy night, the train slowed down as a new station appeared. Jacob scanned the depot for a sign, as the train wound its way through the maze of tracks. It was difficult to see much because of a dense fog that had developed around the town. Finally, he saw a sign on the building. The name of this small Polish town was difficult for Jacob to pronounce. The white rectangular sign with deep, black print said, "Oswiecim." None of the prisoners in Jacob's car had been there. No one knew about the town, or if there was a camp nearby. Another argument ensued about what might happen if someone refused to get out of the train.

The train slowed along the bumpy tracks, but did not stop. Instead, it moved slowly onto another set of tracks, leading out of the town. They left on a spur that took them northwest. Jacob could not imagine what type of camp awaited them. He only knew that they were in Poland, that he would soon freeze to death and that as bad as conditions were at Theresienstadt, they were about to become worse. Conditions were beyond intolerable in the train. Jacob wondered what fresh air smelled like. *I, for one, am ready to jump off of this foul train! I cannot imagine a worse place to stay.*

They traveled northwest for about half an hour on new, bumpy tracks, until they reached their apparent destination. There were at least ten parallel tracks for efficient turnaround. Guard towers and fences appeared through the fog below a large compound. A small sign appeared out of the mist ahead. It was printed in black letters on a white background. "What does the sign say?" asked an old man next to Jacob. Peering through cracks between the wooden planks that were the side of the train, Jacob replied, "It says AUSCHWITZ." There was a great deal of muttering and quiet speculation in the train car. "That is probably the German version of the Polish town we just passed through, Oswiecim," said Jacob. Again there was a lot of muttering and arguing. Finally, an old woman

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who seemed to have been sleeping came to life. “My husband and I passed through Oswiecim. It was 1936. There were no Jews there. In fact, when they discovered that we were Jews, they would not allow us to stay at the inn.” Nobody else had ever heard of this place.

Through cracks and holes in the train, Jacob observed several large buildings and guard towers behind a huge iron gate. A great deal of smoke was coming from one of the buildings directly ahead, while more smoke could be seen from buildings about a mile or two to the left. The train passed through the large iron gate surrounded by a huge curving concrete facade. In the distance to their right, factories loomed, with smokestacks belching thick gray smoke into the black sky.

Snowflakes flew around and through the train’s smoke as it entered the unloading area. Above the curved concrete entrance to the camp was a wrought iron sign that said “*Work will make you free.*” Jacob’s heart skipped a beat. *I have seen that sign! It was in my dream! Oh dear, sweet God. This cannot be happening! This cannot be happening! It was only a dream!* He began sweating, although he was freezing cold. He felt light-headed and dizzy. It was the dream in which Jacob was killed because he refused to burn the corpses of other Jews. The curving, black metal sign was *identical* to the sign in his dream. *How could I have seen this in my sleep? Jacob’s mind was stretching to the limits of sanity. How could a dream come true?* He looked down to see that his hands were trembling. *This is impossible!* But no matter how hard he tried to believe that he was in a dream now, he understood that this was real life. He could not wake himself up.

Jacob saw that an electrified fence surrounded the camp. Guard towers were on each side. He watched as a large group of people walked in their direction from a construction site in the distance to the left. Even at night, this strange place was bustling with activity. Dozens of rows barracks were now visible behind the train station. As far as the eye could see were identical, brown barracks. To the right, Jacob saw a low brick building with a large, tall smokestack belching out a prodigious amount of smoke. Jacob thought it was strange that fire was coming out at the top. *What else could the Nazis be burning that would cause fire to come all of the way up and out of the smokestack? No! This cannot be happening!* If his dream was really coming true, then Jews were being slaughtered and their corpses burned in this terrible new death camp. On the verge of fainting, Jacob slumped against the side of the train. “What’s wrong with you?” asked the old man next to Jacob. You look like you have just seen a ghost.”

Jacob, now curled up tightly on the floor, replied, “I think I’ve seen a lot of ghosts.” The old man shrugged his shoulders and gave Jacob a frustrated expression before he finally turned away.

With screeching brakes and a strong shudder, the train lurched to a stop inside the camp. The iron gates closed behind them. Jacob had a sinking feeling as he heard the gates clatter shut. *This is a terrible place! Will this be the place where I die?* His heart sank as he realized that his dream was about to become reality. “I have a very bad feeling about this,” Jacob said to no one in particular. A bustling boy about six years old looked up at Jacob. He was sprightly, and full

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of energy. The boy smiled, looking into Jacob's eyes. Jacob turned away from him. *Will he soon be dead?*

Jacob could not stop thinking about his parents. He would look for them when it was his turn to get out of the train. He was relatively certain that they were in the next car forward. Rachael was always on his mind and in his dreams, as well. He believed that she was still alive. *But where is she? How will she know where we are? I miss her terribly, yet I am so grateful that she is not in this frightening place! Oh Rachael, I miss you so! Where are you?* Deep in his heart, Jacob believed that he and all of the remaining Salzburg Jews would likely die here.

After about twenty minutes of waiting inside the fetid train, the doors were opened. Jacob could hear a great deal of yelling in German. Uniformed German men and women were screaming at people to come out of the train. A frigid wind whipped into the train. While the temperature was below freezing, it was clean, fresh air, replacing the stagnant, squalid air in the train car. Very strong lights on poles were shining directly into the train cars. The lights almost blinded him. He assumed that they meant to have no stragglers left in the train cars. He also heard dogs barking. Jacob had heard stories about how Germans had trained their dogs to kill Jews. From a safe distance, Jacob had scoffed at those stories. Now, with a shiver, he wondered if they could be true.

The yelling continued. "Leave your possessions inside the train. They will be sent to your barracks later. Come out now!" People on Jacob's train were helping the old prisoners get up from the floor. Some of them had difficulty standing on their own. They were aged, diseased, starved and weak. Worse yet, many of the old people refused to part with their valuables. Men and women clutched their suitcases and bags, refusing to put them down. Finally, guards entered the train and pulled the old people from their valuables. In some cases, they threw people off of the train. Women and children were screaming in all directions. The scene was frightening and chaotic. It seemed that everyone was yelling, except the Jewish prisoners who had been physically thrown off of the train. These unfortunate few lay silently upon the frozen ground.

Suddenly, a German shepherd, with a muzzle made of steel wrapped around his snout, was growling at the open doorway of the train car. The dog snarled at Jacob and lunged at him. Saliva dripped from the dog's vicious mouth. It fell onto the ramp and steam rose up from it. Despite the muzzle, Jacob was eerily frightened and he jumped away from the dog. His heart was pounding with fear. The dog's handler pulled it away and forced Jacob to move down the ramp. *If these dogs have the capacity to frighten men, what must it be like for children?* Jacob could only wonder in amazement how much psychological damage this would do to those innocent children.

Chapter 40

Auschwitz

Stepping off the train and onto the ground, Jacob wrapped himself in his arms to stay warm. The winter's last wretched blast of Arctic air served to make the prisoners even more miserable. The wind and the frigid temperatures seemed unbearable. Everyone's breath rose as steam above his or her head. But, Jacob was not paying attention to the weather. Only one thing dominated his thoughts. *Where are my parents?* Jacob gazed out in the direction of the train car in front of his. He did not see them. *Dear God, did they die along the way?* That thought caused Jacob's heart to jump up in his chest with fear. Also, there was a strange odor here. Jacob could not identify it. It smelled like burned meat, but not exactly. It was a sickly-sweet smell that pervaded everything. Some people covered their faces or put handkerchiefs over their faces, to reduce the odor. And in addition to the light snow, light gray ashes were falling everywhere. People collected some of the ashes in their hands, staring at it in wonderment. It created a gray stain upon their hands as they tried to wash it away. Jacob looked up at the huge smokestack, belching out fire, smoke and ash. *It is coming from there! I know what it is!*

The prisoners struggled to stay warm as they embarked from the train. German guards with automatic weapons were constantly screaming at them. "Line up in groups of five!" The regular army soldiers from the train had disappeared, replaced by the SS. Jacob stood as long as possible upon the ramp, trying to see his parents. While still near the top of the ramp, Jacob observed that there was another camp, on the other side of the train tracks. There were long lines of people going to both camps. He noted that another train was dislodging its load of motley prisoners, farther down the tracks.

Standing on the ramp as long as possible, Jacob wondered why there were two separate camps, not one large camp. Lines of prisoners continued moving in both directions. A frail old woman asked her husband, "Which is the *good* line, Schmuell?" But, Jacob already knew that there were good and bad lines. He understood that only those deemed strong enough for hard labor would be placed in the good line. The others were to be exterminated. And, judging by the appearance of the elderly couple, they would both soon be in the bad line.

Suddenly, a whip cracked against Jacob's neck, breaking the skin. It stung horribly. Still, he remained to search for his parents. The German soldier who had used his whip on Jacob was about to do it again. He looked to be about the same age as Jacob. Replete with stripes and badges upon his black SS uniform, he seemed to be the embodiment of evil. Were it not for the war and the prejudice, they could have been roommates in college. Instead, here they were – enemies. Jacob moved down the ramp and joined the queue, but continued to search for his parents.

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Suddenly, he saw his mother. She was walking feebly down the ramp, next to Moshe. She stumbled twice on the way, clinging to his father. At the bottom, on the ground, she was barely able to stand by herself. Jacob noticed her sway as she stood in line. His father was next to her, holding her by the arm. "Mother, Father," screamed Jacob. He was frantic to make contact with them. A leashed German shepherd was snarling at her feet. Guards were screaming at her to line up. Jacob clenched his fists. *What can I do for them?* Frustrated, Jacob again yelled out, "Mother!" This time, she heard him and turned to look. Unfortunately, she could not tell where the voice came from. She said something to Moshe and he too turned to look. She stared in his direction. Another sharp crack of the whip struck her back and she was forced to move on.

The experience had taken on a surrealistic feeling for Jacob. Here, German soldiers had piled perhaps a thousand Jews onto a train and denied them food and water for more than two days. The prisoners were forced to stand the entire time in a train filled with feces, urine, vomit and corpses. Now the Germans had forced them to stand in freezing temperatures, waiting for a German officer to decide if they would live past this night. It seemed too difficult to process, mentally and emotionally. Jacob felt as though his life had finally come to a breaking point. He and his parents might be dead before dawn. His heart thumped heavily. This devastating predicament seemed impossible to predict. Yet, here he was, at the precipice of existence. Jacob wondered how such a thing could happen.

The prisoners were eerily silent while the Germans screamed at them incessantly. "Leave everything! Leave all of your possessions behind! Come out now! Schnell!"

Jacob could hear children crying amid the constant screaming of orders and beatings. "Line up in groups of five!" the SS guards continued to yell at the disembarking Jews. "March like soldiers! *Links, zvei, drei, vier! Rechts, zvei, drei, vier!* March in rhythm, damn you," screamed the SS guards. The Germans now forced everyone to march in step, while holding their place in line. This could only have been for their sick amusement. The old man who was next to Jacob on the train was not able catch on to the beat and the pace. An SS guard used his whip to force the poor old man to catch on. Jacob saw other guards using sticks to whip those who could not march with the pace. His mind blurred. He tried his best to drag his frozen feet to the rhythm, amid the constant screaming and cursing. Jacob watched as SS officers laughed among themselves at the ridiculous sight of Jews trying to march in rhythm.

Suddenly, Jacob heard a great deal of shouting and screaming at the prisoners coming from his left. He was amazed, however, to hear the screaming in Yiddish. A long line of prisoners walked to the center of the depot, shouting in Yiddish as they arrived. They issued commands to the new prisoners, just as the SS had – except in Yiddish. Jacob quickly surmised that these were "kapos," the prisoners from his nightmare who were forced by the Nazis to work for them. In return for a few more days of life, these Jews did the Nazis' dirty work. They "controlled" the incoming Jewish prisoners, moving them from place to place, ordering them to stand here, to walk there. In his nightmare, Jacob was a kapo,

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forced to work in the crematoria. A few of the new prisoners from Jacob's train resisted the kapos orders. They were soon beaten into submission by a group of kapos. Jacob heard many disparaging comments from his group about the kapos. Yet, he understood that a person can be forced to do terrible things in order to stay alive. He hated the kapos, yet understood their predicament. If there were no kapos, the Germans would accomplish their mission on their own. The kapos created order from chaos.

As Jacob was slowly adjusting to the bright lights, he surveyed the camp. It was difficult to see well at night, but he began to gain an appreciation of the sheer size of the complex. To his right was what resembled an administration building. A sign indicated part of it to be the commandant's office. Next to it was a building with a red cross on it – the infirmary he presumed. To his left, he saw many more rows of barracks – as far as could be seen. Behind the barracks, in the far distance, Jacob saw a factory. He could see lights through its windows. Smoke was coming out from several chimneys.

The buildings directly in front of Jacob, in the "other" camp, confused him. One of the buildings looked like a small cottage with brick walls. This "cottage" had a long rectangular tunnel connecting it to another building, which was larger than the cottage. He thought for a moment that he saw men walking upon the roof of the two buildings. *Why would men be on the roof of a building when it was mostly snow-covered? Who would repair a roof in this weather?* And they did not appear to carry tools or supplies. Jacob thought that was very strange. But what disturbed Jacob the most was the large chimney rising like an evil tower from the larger building. It was the chimney that Jacob observed from the train, belching out fire and smoke. It was too small to be a factory. And it was too large to be a place to burn trash. Then, Jacob saw a line of people going into the building. The line was huge. Jacob traced it back, across the tracks, around the first row of buildings and all of the way back to the courtyard where he was standing. He also noticed something strange about that line of people. It contained primarily old people, small children and the sick. There were few strong, young or healthy people in that line. The more Jacob watched, the more disturbed he became. He saw hundreds of those people going into the building in the distance, at the "other" camp. But he saw no people coming out. That was surely the "bad" line.

Jacob tried to tell himself that the group in the bad line could be coming out on the other side of the building, or that there was a tunnel or some other exit. But people continued to go in, and the chimney continued to belch fire and smoke. *What are they burning in there?* Jacob's nightmare was never far from his conscious thoughts. But now, he was confronted with it in person. The reality of the terror crashed into him. Jacob's mind was spinning now. His heart was pounding in his chest. *Could my dream finally be coming true? If so, then God help those poor innocent people in the bad line.*

As Jacob moved forward in line, he observed that the people coming from the train were being examined by physicians and then assigned to one of the two lines that disappeared into buildings. One of the lines, the one that Jacob had already seen, with the elderly, invalids and children, led to the red brick building

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on the left. The other line went into a building that Jacob had not seen before. It was about the same size as the ubiquitous barracks. As he neared the table, he saw a sign on that building that said "TO SHOWERS AND DISINFECTANT." He then saw another sign on the front of the building with the tall smokestack. It said "TO BATHS AND INHALATION." One of them was real he suspected. The other was a lie. Considering the one to the left was belching fire, smoke and ash, it was easy to tell which line was the "good" line if there could really be a "good" line. He shivered when he thought about what was about to happen to these poor people, including his beloved parents. Jacob prayed desperately that his dream was not a prophecy, but only the product of a vivid adolescent imagination. After some time, he finally reached the physician's table.

A middle-aged German officer soon arrived, with lower-ranking officers in tow. Every German soldier snapped to attention as soon as they saw this man. He stood in front of the new prisoners, silently. Jacob wondered who he was. Finally, he spoke. "I am SS-Obersturmbannführer Franz Stangl. I am your camp commander." He paused, again mysteriously silent. The prisoners waited patiently for him to speak. Most of them were in continuous movement, attempting to keep warm. Their exhaled breath formed a sort of haze over the large group. Stangl continued, "Welcome to Auschwitz. If you follow orders and you work hard, you will find this camp to your liking. Here, we all work. We have no tolerance for slackers or troublemakers. I warn you now not to try to escape. Look up at our guard towers. Look at the electrified fences. Look at the guards with machine guns." Stangl paused again.

A woman near the front moved forward and began to ask a question. She was old and frail, with tattered clothes and a dark red babushka on her head. "Herr Stangl, I would like to request a... Suddenly, the poor old woman was clubbed with the end of a soldier's rifle. She slumped to the ground as blood gushed from her crushed skull. Jacob looked up at Stangl and saw him *smile*. At first, it hardly registered. But Jacob was certain that Stangl *enjoyed* watching the poor old woman die. *He is a sadist!* The smile flickered and then disappeared.

Stangl continued, "As I have said, we allow no trouble of any kind here. Work hard and you will continue to live. Slack off and you will meet the same fate as this old woman. Remember what it says upon our gate. Work will make you free!" With that, Stangl abruptly turned and marched, along with his cadre of officers, back to a nearby building. Jacob looked at the faces of the people around him. Upon each face, he saw fear, sadness and shock. They had the look of someone who cannot process what he sees. Many nervously glanced up at the thundering, spewing smokestack. Everyone had heard rumors of "death camps" in the East. It did not take much intelligence to observe the foul-smelling smokestack and realize that humans were being burned here. For months in Theresienstadt, people had done whatever they could to avoid coming here. Now, they seemed in shock. They stared at everything with disbelief. Jacob realized that the Nazis had no crueller place than this. Still, the faces of the prisoners showed astonishment, as well, as fear. They smiled at their children and told them that they were fine. "It is only a work camp," a nearby woman told her young daughter. Her husband frowned and shook his head.

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Jacob was amazed by the vast numbers of kapos. At Theresienstadt, there were perhaps a few dozen kapos. Here, he saw hundreds. They all wore the same clothing that Jacob had seen in his dream. It resembled striped pajamas, with an insignia on the front left. Jewish prisoners had pajamas with a Star of David on the front. Political prisoners had their own insignia, as did captured soldiers.

The German guards and Jewish kapos were now separating the men from the women. As they did this, they also separated the children from their parents. The scene suddenly turned into panic and chaos. It would haunt Jacob's mind forever. Children were torn away from parents. Wives were separated from their husbands. Brothers were removed from sisters, aunts and uncles from nieces and nephews. They screamed, cried, cajoled and begged. The guards and kapos brutally shoved prisoners into separate lines. Almost everyone finally understood that they had reached the end. This would be the last time that they would see their loved ones. They kissed and held onto each other desperately. Jacob again stood on his toes in a vain attempt to see his parents. They had disappeared into the vast crowd of terrified humanity.

Women screamed in anguish as SS guards ripped their children away from their arms. Children shrieked for their mothers and fathers as the guards dragged them away. It was utter madness. Jacob could not see where they were taking the children, since he was virtually blinded by the bright camp floodlights. He put his arm up to shield the light and look, but received a sharp crack on the back of his head by an SS guard for his effort.

Jacob stared at the screaming mob of terrified people as one might look at a hurricane or train wreck. It was a hectic disaster in the making and he could do nothing to prevent it. Suddenly, one of the guards shot his machine gun into the air. The screaming abruptly stopped. Jacob saw many of the male prisoners scanning the guard towers and electrified walls of the camp, as he had done upon leaving the train. It offered no hope for escape. Even at night, the camp was lit by dozens of floodlights. A tunnel, perhaps... In the brief silence, after the gunshots, a tall SS officer screamed at them. "If you will not separate into the lines as we have asked, we will shoot you where you stand!" Everyone began to comply, quietly grumbling. The children continued to scream as they were led away to a building on the right. The remaining adults formed into two lines, based on gender, moving towards an area with tables and what appeared to be doctors.

As Jacob watched this appalling scene unfold, he also saw kapos leading some of the old and frail from the group away. One or two at a time, the elderly were led away. They walked on crutches or with arms around a strong person. These feeble people moved away with kapos as though they were moving from the living room into the kitchen. They reminded Jacob of sheep, on their way to the slaughterhouse. They had fear on their faces. But they remained obediently quiet. A few of these old people anxiously looked back at their children and grandchildren, as though to say good-bye. The kapos led them around a long, low brick building on the right. Jacob saw the Red Cross insignia in a window. It must be the infirmary, he thought. After that, they disappeared from sight. He

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was grateful that his mother was not among them. Moments later, he heard the popping sounds from rifles, machine guns and pistols. Even behind a faraway building, the sound was terrifying to Jacob. The roar of hundreds of rounds of ammunition firing at once was startling. It created an echo that bounced from building to building, lasting long after the shots were fired. Jacob stood in his place in awe of the distressing sound. Later, he would learn that the old and frail from a prior group had been gunned down and pushed into a large pit behind the infirmary.

Now that the very old and the very young had been separated, the remaining adult prisoners waited their turn in the large freezing courtyard, shuffling slowly towards tables with white linen cloth on top. At each table was a physician, identified by a long white medical coat, with a stethoscope wrapped around his neck. Next to each physician was an SS officer. Behind the tables, German soldiers stood in a line with machine guns at the ready. Many of the soldiers were handling ferocious, growling dogs. Jacob could hear one very common question, repeated by the doctors. "Are you a twin? Are there any twins here? Speak up if you are a twin!"

The physicians made many prisoners take off their clothes, especially the elderly. The prisoner was told to stand straight and turn around. Sometimes, the physician would listen to the prisoner's heart and lungs. He heard the doctors ask, "Are you sick? Do you have a fever? Have you had typhus? Have you had tuberculosis? Have you had syphilis?" Jacob wondered how people could tolerate being naked in such freezing temperatures, understanding that his turn would arrive soon. After this cursory examination, the physician assigned prisoners to one of two lines.

The good line wound its way towards the "other" camp. He heard people nearby use the word "Birkenau" several times. *What does it mean? How many camps are here?* It was clear that the Germans were paring the group down to those who were capable of hard work. Jacob's mind was flying with terrifying possibilities. *What will happen to Mother? What happened to the children?* Jacob's worst fear was that the physician would send his mother into the "bad" line. The typhus and starvation gave her an appearance many years older than her real age. She was extremely thin and frail. Jacob wanted to shout at her. He wanted to tell her not to admit that she had typhus. He wanted to scream at her to make her convince the Germans that she could work. But, of course, she was too far away to hear. And he would likely be beaten for the action. So, he remained in line, freezing and in mental anguish.

"Where is the line with the older people going?" Jacob asked this question to no one in particular.

Suddenly, a low, deep voice from behind answered. "They're going to a place that you never want to see. If you aren't strong enough to work in the factory, you go there – and you never return." Jacob spun around and saw that the man who spoke was not in line. He was a kapo, walking back and forth near Jacob's line.

"Who are you," asked Jacob.

"My name is none of your business, lad," he growled. He was a strong,

heavy-set middle-aged man. His arms and legs were muscular and large. Perhaps he had been a farmer or laborer. The man had a round, grizzled face that was also deeply lined. His short beard was mostly white, although some of the thinning hair on his head was light brown. His deep-set, dark eyes peered at Jacob under bushy gray eyebrows. There was something very frightening in his eyes. This man had the look of someone who had seen hell and had come back to tell about it. Jacob eyed the man strangely.

“So, what is Birkenau?” asked Jacob.

The kapo with the round face glared back at Jacob. “There are many camps here, son. There is a camp called Birkenau, where many laborers live. As I just told you, there is also a place where they take people who can’t work.” Jacob was still confused. “Can I visit someone there?” Two nearby kapos heard Jacob’s question and began to laugh. The strong kapo smiled briefly. He moved closer to Jacob and whispered in Jacob’s right ear. “Do you smell that horrid odor?” Jacob looked at the kapo’s eyes. They were dark, almost lifeless eyes. They were the eyes of someone who had seen terror.

“Yes, I smell it,” said Jacob. I saw a huge chimney, when the train arrived. There was fire at the top.” The dark-eyed kapo again whispered in Jacob’s ear.

“You cannot identify that odor, can you?” Jacob thought about it for a moment, and then shook his head.

“It smells like burnt meat to me. But I’ve never smelled anything quite like this before.” Again, the nearby kapos chuckled.

The dark-eyed kapo grabbed Jacob’s arm and held it tight. “Try to prepare yourself for something horrible.” Suddenly, Jacob was afraid to hear the answer. *I know what you plan to say, because I have been here before – in my nightmare.* But the words were already arriving in his right ear. “No, my young friend, you may not visit your friends or relatives who travel in that line. In a few moments, they will all be dead. Their heads will be shaved. All of their valuables will be removed. They will be ordered to take off their clothing and prepare for a ‘shower and disinfectant.’ Then, they will be forced into a large crowded room with plumbing and showerheads on the ceiling. But there will be no water. Soldiers on the roof will drop pellets of poison gas into the room. Within fifteen minutes, everyone in the room will be dead. The bodies will be removed and taken to the nearby crematoria, where they will be burned in the huge furnace. The strange smell that you can’t identify is the smell of burning people – mostly Jews. The ashes that constantly fall upon us are the cremated remains of thousands of people – people like you and me, but unable to work.” The kapo issued this last part of his statement with a wink of his left eye. “And, if I hear you tell anyone else in this line about it, I will make sure that you go straight to the gas room.”

Jacob’s head was swimming. He became dizzy. The world seemed to be spinning in circles. He suddenly felt nauseous and he broke out in a cold sweat. *So, that was why I saw men upon the roof. The world cannot possibly be this unfair!* He was very dizzy. He would have fallen to the ground were it not for the Kapo holding his arm. “No!” Jacob shouted at the kapo. “No! You are lying!” But deep in Jacob’s heart, he understood that the kapo told the truth. That terrible smell did seem reminiscent of burned meat. He began to cry. “How can

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men do... such things to other men?" The kapos stopped smiling and stared at him. Jacob doubled over and retched. A small amount of vomit arose and fell to the mud at his feet. There was almost nothing in his stomach to bring up. When he was able to look up again, his face was as white as a ghost. The thought of his mother being killed at this very moment was overwhelming. He sobbed as tried to stand up again. "My mother is..." Unable to continue, Jacob fell to the ground. "How can they do this to us? What did we do to deserve it? Jacob was now very agitated, with tears flowing down his cheeks. "What did my mother do to deserve this?"

Jacob was attracting attention. So far, only a few prisoners and two other kapos were aware of his disturbance. But, they knew that soon a guard would see Jacob lying on the ground. The dark-eyed kapo bent over and pulled Jacob to his feet. He whispered in Jacob's ear, "Now, young man. Listen to me! If they think you aren't strong, they will kill you. Never let them see you lying on the ground. Never let them see you weak! Never!" The kapo shouted this into Jacob's ear, over the thundering tower of fire.

Suddenly, the world came back into focus for Jacob. The spinning came to an end, as did the nausea. Jacob's fear and anguish over his mother's impending death was still shocking. He felt deep anger and resentment. But, he understood that he could not allow his emotions to drive his actions. The kapo, who remained by his side whispered, "Anger is good. It will keep you alive. Keep it, until you are free, or dead." Their eyes met again for a moment. In the kapo's eyes, Jacob now saw strength.

"I will use this strength from anger and I will stay alive. Will you?" A brief smile formed on the corners of the kapo's lips. "What's your name, young man?"

The kapos were called away to discipline another line of incoming prisoners, leaving Jacob alone. He stretched to see his parents. His heart was still pounding fiercely when he realized that the Germans might select his mother for "special treatment" instead the other "main" camp. For all he knew, they might take his father as well. However, the skills of a physician might be a welcome tool for the Nazis. He thought that his father looked well enough to work, despite his suddenly aged appearance. But his mother was another story. She did not appear well enough to work. He wondered if she would admit to the German physician that she recently had typhus. If only he could warn her. If only he could tell her to stand up straight and admit to no illness.

Suddenly, he saw her approach a table in the distance. With all of his might, Jacob shouted at her. "Mother! Mother! She turned her head. *Is it her?* He shouted again. "Don't tell them that you've been sick! Don't tell them! She heard his voice, but not the message. Hanna heard Jacob's voice and turned to locate him. She searched but did not see him. He shouted at her again. She placed her hand against her ear, indicating that she did not hear or understand him. Finally, she saw him and smiled.

Suddenly, a German soldier approached Jacob and smashed the butt of his rifle into Jacob's stomach. The blow was powerful enough to knock Jacob's breath away. He tried to yell again at his mother, but had no breath at all. He crumpled to the ground, doubled over in pain. As soon as he could, Jacob stood

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up and searched for his mother. There she was, at the examination table! Jacob watched helplessly as the German physician examined his mother. The soldier next to Jacob punched him in his ribs, creating an instant jolt of new pain. When Jacob was able to look again, his mother was forced to take her clothes off. She looked like a walking skeleton. Jacob saw his mother's protruding ribs. *Oh my God, she looks like all bones.* Jacob could not bear to watch her humiliation and turned away. The next time he looked, he saw his mother in line for "special treatment." Jacob could do nothing but cry in anguish. He hoped that his father would be saved from the same terrible fate.

When Jacob finally reached the front of his line, the physician told him to remove his clothing. Jacob stood naked, shivering and embarrassed. The freezing air was like needles upon his bare skin. Yet, Jacob's mind was elsewhere. He was overcome with sadness. Jacob was grieving for his mother. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

But suddenly, a glance to the right revealed his father. He stood at the examination table for his line. He too was naked and being inspected by the Nazi doctor. The Nazi doctor poked and prodded at Moshe. Finally, he asked Moshe for his occupation. When he heard the word physician, his eyes lit up. "What sort of physician are you, old man?"

"I am a surgeon," replied Moshe. With a flick of his wrist and one finger of his right hand, the Nazi passed Moshe along to the line on the left. Jacob saw that his father was selected for the "good" group that was moving to the building on the left. He sighed with relief. *Thank God that father is not in the same line with mother. But, she will be all alone now! She will die not with family, but with strangers!*

Jacob stood shivering. But, his doctor was not finished with him. "Open your mouth," ordered the Nazi doctor. "Stick out your tongue." Jacob's breath rose into the black sky, a fine cloud of silver mist that disappeared. The doctor continued to probe him, pushing in various places to seek out swollen glands. He looked at Jacob's eyes, hands and fingernails. He pushed in around Jacob's neck and listened to his heart with a stethoscope. Finally, assessing that Jacob was not seriously ill, he told him to put his clothes back on. Then, the SS officer sitting at Jacob's table gave him a kick and told him to move along to the left.

As Jacob was about to step into the good line, he thought about his mother. She must already know what is happening. *Oh Dear God, why can't I save her? Why can't I help my mother?* He looked at the nearby SS troops, with their machine guns ever-raised. He looked at the electrified fence that surrounded the buildings. Every fiber of Jacob's consciousness screamed at him to run and help his mother. Yes, grab her out of line and spirit her out of the camp. Yes, take her and run to the forest! And then, reality intervened. *Only an idiot would do that! It is suicidal. Then, two out of the three would be dead.* Jacob's mind was split apart with the terror of his mother's fate.

Suddenly, Jacob was stunned by the blow of a nearby soldier. The guard slammed his rifle upon Jacob's back and he fell to the ground in agony. "Get up and move or I will shoot you, Yid!" screamed the soldier. A kapo suddenly grasped Jacob's arm and pulled him away. It was the same strong man who had

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talked to him in line. Jacob turned and stole one final look at his mother, who was about to enter the structure to the right. Tears streamed down his face. *Good-bye Mother! I won't forget you!* The strong kapo pulled him again and they stopped at a corner. Jacob desperately wanted to see his mother again.

Hanna was told to undress by the Nazi doctor at the end of her line. For a moment, she thought that she heard Jacob's voice shouting to her from the distance. She looked up in that direction and held one of her hands to her ear, as though it might improve her hearing. Suddenly, she was pushed forward by a guard who turned her attention to the nearby doctor. She did not hear Jacob's voice again.

Hanna's Nazi physician was a middle-aged man with jet-black hair, pasted backwards across his scalp with a thick hair cream. Under his long, thin aristocratic nose was a short thick, neatly trimmed mustache. It seemed that most German men now wore that Hitler-type mustache. This physician turned his attention to Hanna. She stared at him. Hanna felt as though he was examining an animal for the slaughterhouse. His expression lacked even a remote glimpse of compassion or feeling. His bark brown eyes flickered across Hanna's battered, thin body. Like many in her line, Hanna was emaciated. But the doctor also noticed that she was jaundiced. When asked to raise her arms, her ribs almost pushed their way out of her paper-thin skin.

Hanna Silverman was never a heavy woman. But the woman telling the SS officer that her name was Hanna Silverman looked like a talking skeleton. Even the bones in her face seemed to protrude through her skin. Her eyes had deep dark hollows around them. The whites of her eyes were yellowish. The Nazi doctor was asking her many questions. "Have you ever had typhus?"

Hanna started to say yes, then quickly changed her mind and said "no."

"Have you had dysentery?" She replied to the negative. He stared at her for several seconds, and her life hung in the balance. Her heart pounded in her chest. The world faded away. She saw only his steely-blue eyes and his right hand. Their eyes locked for a moment. Then, he pointed to the right.

Hanna put her clothes back on and followed a large woman who was in front of her to the walkway on the right. The long curving walkway to the right ended at the building that Jacob had called "the other camp." For the first time, Hanna noticed that almost everyone in her line was very old, sick or very young. Children were crying and screaming for their mothers. Many of their mothers were assigned to the other line, like Jacob and Moshe. Hanna implored the old, sick mothers and grandmothers to comfort the children. A few of them volunteered. The screaming of the children and the bustling of the crowd made the scene chaotic and haunting. Everyone looked at each other as though seeking guidance. Hanna's mind raced. *What is this place? Why was I selected for this line? Where am I going? What will they do to me?*

Then, slowly, Hanna realized that the strong and healthy prisoners were assigned to the line to the left. They would probably be forced into slave labor, she thought. But her line was filled with those too old, too young or too sick to work. For the first time, she realized that she had "failed" the physician's examination, probably as a result of her recent bout with typhus.

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Several German guards, with muzzled German shepherd dogs barking at their sides, formed the outside of their line. There was no way out. Hanna grabbed two toddlers and held the hand of a third, offering as much protection as she could. An SS sergeant was counting the line. He cut off the line just two positions behind Hanna. The vicious snapping and yelping dogs frightened everyone, particularly the children. Hanna and her group were told to walk into the cottage. When they were all inside, the door behind them was closed and locked with a large thud.

Stopping just before the corner, Jacob paused for one final look at the building with the fiery smokestack to the right. He now had a perfect vantage point to observe it. The chimney was still thundering and belching out great fireballs and ash. His mind was spinning with terrifying thoughts. *How many people must be in that fire to create such a powerful stench?* The roaring fire in the chimney was so powerful that Jacob could feel the ground trembling. He saw the long line of prisoners waiting to enter. The line stretched from the building entrance all of the way to the railway station, where a new group of prisoners were being lined up “in fives.” Looking behind the building, Jacob saw his mother. Light snow continued to fall, mingling with the ashes. But, there she was, holding two young children and holding the hand of a third. The children were crying mildly, but all three of them were looking at Hanna. She had succeeded in capturing their attention away from the horror of reality. Like a good mother, she took them under her wing and protected them from the terror that surrounded them. They were now focused upon Hanna and whatever tale she was telling them.

Jacob stood at the corner, observing the horror of death as it prepared to visit his family. From his new vantage point, he was certain that there was no line of people leaving the building. Prisoners only entered. No one left the building, except the SS and kapos. Jacob trembled as the enormity of the terror crashed down upon his mind. *There is no one leaving the building! How can so many enter and none leave?* Then, his heart jumped up into his throat. He clearly saw three men walking upon the roof of the low building next to the building with the chimney. He could clearly see them this time. They wore large overcoats over their uniforms. But Jacob’s heart skipped a beat when he saw that they also wore large gas masks, covering the entire face. *Walter’s story was correct! They use some sort of poison gas to kill hundreds of people at a time! And my mother is in a line for that building! My nightmare is coming true!*

Just then, he saw a group of five kapos walk to the rear of the chimney building with a large wagon containing two empty wheelbarrows. The kapos raced around the building with these wheelbarrows as though their masters’ whips were at their backs. *What’s their hurry?* They left Jacob’s field of vision. In a moment, they returned. Both wheelbarrows were filled with ashes. The kapos were covered by the fine, powdery ash. As they left to take the ashes somewhere, another group of kapos arrived with an empty wagon. It was an assembly line of sorts. Jacob hated the kapos for cooperating with the Nazis. Yet, he realized that they were only doing what was necessary to stay alive.

The top of the towering chimney continued to belch out great fireballs of

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flame and smoke. For the first time, away from the noisy train engines, Jacob could hear the sound of the fire rising through the chimney. It sounded exactly like the fire in his nightmare. It could have been the rushing sounds of a hurricane, or a freight train. Jacob's legs weakened and he became dizzy.

For a moment, Jacob thought that he might fall and he braced himself against the side of the red brick building. "How can this come true?" Jacob asked to no one. A man with a long flowing beard and curly black hair looked at Jacob with curiosity.

"Don't you know, young man," he intoned in a deep resonating voice. "In every generation, our enemies rise up against us. Why should we be an exception?" Several other men chuckled behind the man. It was a reference from the Passover Haggadah. His eyes met Jacob's for a moment. "We're Jews aren't we?" he asked rhetorically. "Yes," replied Jacob. "But, one day we will have our own country. One day, there will be a place in the world where Jews are safe." Jacob had no idea why he said those things. He only understood that he was powerfully angry and terribly frightened. *Perhaps a person will say anything under such circumstances.* A kapo pushed Jacob inside the building. Jacob took one final look at his mother. He saw that she was dying while helping children. It seemed appropriate. As tears ran down his face, he said good-bye to his mother. *Mother, I will never see you again! I love you!*

The room Jacob was forced into turned out to be a long hallway, with a ceiling that curved downward from the top to the walls. Bare light bulbs encased behind strips of painted metal emerged from the dark ceiling. The walls were light gray on top and dark green on the bottom. Water dripped from the ceiling in places, leaving small puddles on the concrete floor. The room smelled of mold and dampness. The dark place would have been depressing even without its connotation of death, thought Jacob. A horizontal line of black paint separated the other two colors on the walls. Under that black line there were numbered hooks on the walls over simple wooden benches. As they entered, each person was given a piece of string. They were told that this was to tie their shoes together. Jacob's ribs were terribly painful from his encounter with the guard while he was in line. Each time that he moved, they provided a jolt of pain. He wondered if some of his ribs were broken.

The Germans filled the damp, shadowy building with prisoners until it was completely crowded. As the doors closed solidly behind them, kapos began issuing orders to the prisoners. They spoke as though they had memorized the same specific speech. They wore the red and white striped pajamas of Jacob's dream. There was a Star of David on their clothes, over the heart. Some wore an armband with "kapo" on it in red. A few had smart-looking military-style hats with gold and red rings. They pushed, bumped, and screamed at the prisoners, just as the Germans did. "Remove all of your possessions now. If you fail to turn in anything, you will be beaten." The kapos walked back and forth examining each of the new prisoners. "Give me your watch," one demanded. "I want that pen," said another. "Empty your pockets," was a frequent demand. A kapo yelled out to the group, "A prisoner was hung here just this morning because he hid things from us!"

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Jacob noticed that the kapos were taking in quite a haul. He wondered how many of them kept the goods for themselves. One well-dressed man was forced to empty his suit coat pockets, revealing a cache of diamonds. The nearest kapo scooped them up and quickly placed them in his pocket. He scanned the room quickly to see if any of the other kapos had seen his new discovery. His new haul seemed safe for the moment. Jacob wondered how these kapos, who were mostly Jews, could steal from their own people. He wanted to ask one of them. Afraid of another beating, he decided to remain quiet.

Jacob was still in a state of shock. His heart fluttered. *Is my dream coming true? Am I destined to join these Jews who kill Jews for the Germans? How could this happen? How can a dream come true?* Jacob's head was swimming. "I could never do that to my own people," he said to the man next to him.

A nearby kapo overheard the remark. He was a little older than Jacob, wiry and wide-eyed. He pulled Jacob close to him and said, "You will do anything to live one more day. You will see." Their eyes met for a moment. He was young and full of himself, thought Jacob. Yet, Jacob could feel the young man's fear. It was all over him. Jacob hoped that he would have the courage to take his own life rather than help the Nazis. But the young man continued. "You have only arrived. But when it's your turn, you will do anything – whatever it takes, for one more minute of life. You will see," admonished the man. Jacob pushed him away. "You will see! You will see!" Jacob heard the young man scream at him, as he walked away. *What sort of macabre circus have I entered? And, when will I wake up?* But, Jacob had to admit that this was reality, not a dream.

An SS officer at the front of the barracks announced, "You will remove any and all valuables from your pockets and deposit them into these containers. These include money, gold, silver, watches, pens, jewelry or anything else. Eyeglasses go in this pile, the officer said while motioning to a dark corner of the long room. You will soon be inspected. Anyone found still in possession of any of the aforementioned items will be shot." Despite the warning, Jacob saw that many of the men in his group continued to keep contraband items. Many continued to wear watches and rings. Others wore a necklace, with a Star of David or a "Chai" on the chain. With amazement, Jacob watched as men were beaten until they removed their jewelry.

The kapos moved through the mass of people, shouting and cursing as they conducted a person-by-person inspection. Within moments, as if from nowhere, mounds of valuables began to form at the front of the building, on top of the blanket. A pile of watches here, a stack of gold coins there – pens, golden chains, necklaces, diamonds of all shapes and sizes – and all sorts of currency, even American dollars.

The kapos continued with prepared announcements. They identified themselves as "kapos." They said that they were "helping" the Germans to resettle Jews here in Poland. They repeated the same things many times, making sure that the newly arriving prisoners understood exactly what to do. It seemed that, above all, they wished to inspire fear. A new kapo arrived near Jacob. He was a young man, perhaps in his early twenties. Like Jacob, he was exceedingly thin, but not particularly malnourished. He had thin, brown, balding hair and what

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looked like several days growth of beard. He seemed agitated and nervous. Jacob was certain that he was hiding something. He identified himself as Avrom.

Avrom stood directly in front of the SS soldiers, armed with machine guns. He glared at the new prisoners. "Give me everything that you have, immediately!" Avrom announced in a quiet, but stern voice. He locked eyes with Jacob. They could have been friends, playing basketball at the same Jewish Community Center. Suddenly, they were enemies. Jacob had one ring, a gift from his maternal aunt. He also had fifteen Reich marks and a watch from his diseased maternal grandfather. "Look," continued Avrom without averting his steady gaze into Jacob's eyes, "any other kapo here would beat it out of you. I'm asking you now for all of your possessions." Jacob reached into his trousers pocket and produced the money and watch. He struggled for a moment to remove his ring. Avrom casually threw these objects into a large pile of valuables, resting atop a pale green wool blanket. Jacob thought to himself that the Nazis could strip him of his possessions and his clothing, but they could not take away his intellect. *I will still have my memories, my hopes and dreams – my Jewish soul.*

Nearby, an argument escalated into a shouting match. A very tall, thin bearded man was telling a kapo that he would not remove his gold wedding ring. His face was long, with large sad brown eyes. Jacob noticed that he was wearing at least three shirts and two trousers, under a long, heavy overcoat. Like most of the prisoners, he wore multiple layers of clothing, instead of shoving them into a suitcase or backpack. A short, fat kapo was arguing with him over the ring. The top of the kapo's head barely reached the tall man's shoulders. Had a fist fight occurred, Jacob was certain that the thin man would win. The argument reached the shouting stage, with the kapo screaming at the tall man. "I want that ring! Take it off at once," he demanded.

The tall man screamed back. "It's my wedding ring and I will die with it on my hand." Instantly, an SS Lieutenant approached, opening his holster as he walked. Without saying a word, the SS officer pulled out his pistol and shot the man through his forehead. Blood, bone and bits of brains flew out from the back of the bearded man's head, spraying the man behind him, whose face now dripped red. Jacob saw the poor bearded man's eyes rise up in his head. The tall man then crumpled backwards to the concrete floor. Jacob's heart fluttered as he recalled his nightmare ending in exactly the same manner. The kapo put two fingers in his mouth to gather saliva and then used it to remove the wedding ring. Underneath, a ring of white skin remained on the tall man's dead finger.

Pushed strongly from behind, Jacob entered a room where prisoners received a tattoo. Here they also shaved the heads of prisoners. Each person was told to sit in a chair while a Kapo slowly tattooed an assigned number on their left forearm. It was painful, but the humiliation was worse. When it was done, Jacob twisted and turned his arm to see what the Nazis had done. In dark blue he saw the number, "100947." *Now, I have been reduced to a number. I am no longer a person to these evil people. I am only "number 100947." I am like cattle or sheep that have been identified by their owners. And, we know exactly what happens to them, don't we?* A kapo wrote the number of his tattoo in a large accounting-style ledger book, along with Jacob's name and age. Jacob noticed

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that the heading over the last column on each page was titled “*Deceased.*” He felt a shiver run up his spine. *That space will be filled in when I am no longer of value to them as a slave.*

On the other side of the room, Jacob saw the kapo that he had seen outside earlier. It was the strong middle-aged man with a round face, who told Jacob about “special treatment” and the “other” line. He too was directing a group of prisoners. Jacob asked Avrom who that man was. Avrom looked at Jacob for a moment, as though contemplating something. Then, he softly said, “That’s Samuel.” Jacob noticed the sound of respect when Avrom mentioned Samuel’s name.

“He’s special, isn’t he?” asked Jacob. Their eyes met again. After a brief moment, Avrom smiled.

“You don’t miss much, do you?” Avrom paused for a moment, looking at Samuel again. “Yes, he’s special. He is the leader of our barracks. There is not a kapo in Auschwitz who doesn’t respect him – even if they are his enemy.”

Jacob wondered how much he had to learn about this strange place. Here, in this hell-on-earth prison, Jews apparently had an opportunity to live if they agreed to help the Nazis. But this was a place where there were both good and bad Jews. This was a place where Jews did unspeakable things to other Jews – just to stay alive for another day, or week or month. He wondered if his own conscience could bear the guilt of doing such things. For almost three years, Jacob had been bothered by his terrible nightmare. Suddenly, it was apparent that it would soon become reality. *Why was I given advance warning of this place in the form of a dream? Why was my father told “Yours will save many” by someone in their dying breath? What does it all mean? Am I to do something important here? If so, what should I do?*

These thoughts frightened Jacob in a way he had never experienced before. Yes, he had been afraid of beatings at the hands of Nazis and the hated Hitler-youth. That was physical pain. He understood that his body would heal itself. But the thought of doing the work of the Nazis for them was a pain upon his very soul. Doing something so terrible frightened Jacob. But, he could not shake the feeling that God implanted the nightmare as both a warning and an inspiration. *I must observe, listen and learn. Then, if I can stay alive long enough, I will know what to do. God will show me. Or, it will become obvious.*

Avrom moved between the dozen or so people on Jacob’s side of the room. He then turned his attention to a new group of Jews that had just entered the large room. He spoke in sternly measured tones. “Take all of your clothing off. Hang your clothes on the hooks provided for you on the wall next to you. Tie your shoes together so that you can find them later. Place all of your valuables on top of this blanket. Don’t bother hiding anything. Every crease and crevice of your body will be searched. If you are found hiding something, you will be beaten. You will be going into another room for disinfectant showers. Your heads will be shaved to prevent lice.” Jacob and the men around him slowly took their clothes off and waited for their turn to move into the next room.

Moments later, Jacob hung his clothing on hook number “212,” and stood with his hands against the wall. The cold concrete wall was freezing. “Bend

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over, Jew!" screamed a fat kapo. He did as he was told, still staring at the cold wall. Suddenly, someone's cold fingers were inside of his anus. He screamed in pain. In return, a nearby guard shoved his rifle into Jacob's ribs, which hurt even more. Moments later, when the kapo was satisfied that Jacob hid nothing inside his body, the fingers were withdrawn. Jacob was grateful for the relief. The pain and humiliation were startling. "Keep moving!" yelled another kapo. "Go over there," he shouted, pointing at the next room. It was a holding area for the shower room. With each step, Jacob became increasingly terrified. *I am walking to my death now!*

Meanwhile, Hanna found herself under similar circumstances. She was in line for "bath and inhalation." Unlike Jacob, however, she did not receive a tattoo. Hanna's group had to wait for another group to complete their "showers" in the room behind a huge door at the end of the hallway. They moved forward slowly, eventually entering a holding area. Here, their heads were shaved. Hanna found herself humiliated, standing alone, bald and naked. She covered her body in shame. Then, motherhood took over and she helped the children as their heads were shaved. She watched as many other women went through the same procedure. Some of the young girls cried loudly and thrashed when it was their turn to have their hair cut. The kapos and German guards screamed at them and beat them constantly.

There were many women kapos and German guards at this prison. "Move here! Bend back! Open your mouth! Bend over!" Suddenly, while bending forward, Hanna realized that someone with a glove had their fingers inside her anus. She screamed out in surprise and pain. The kapo standing next to her clubbed Hanna over the head. Hanna fell to the floor. Warm blood flowed down from the top of her head, pooling upon her right shoulder. While she was on the floor, someone examined the inside of her vagina for contraband. Finally, someone picked Hanna up and carried her to the side of the room. It was an older woman who was also a kapo. She smiled gently at Hanna. "They know that some of us came here hiding diamonds and other valuables in our private places," she said. "You would be surprised to see what comes out." Hanna contemplated people carrying diamonds in such a place for a moment. What the world has come to, she thought. She sat quietly for a few minutes while the kindly old woman used a cloth to stop her scalp from bleeding.

Tension in the room was rising and many women, as well as girls, were sobbing. Another young child screamed incessantly for her mother, who was nowhere to be found. No one was able to comfort the child. The unremitting screaming was making everyone more anxious. Several women held the child and tried to comfort her. But the child continued to wail and scream. Finally, a tall, thin German soldier, who had been guarding the door, came over and without the slightest trace of emotion; he slammed his rifle upon the child's head. He used such force that the poor child's skull broke open, exposing her brain. Blood spurted out, covering the two women holding her. Some of it landed upon the German's trousers and boot. He ignored it and calmly walked back to his post. The ensuing silence was deafening.

Hanna looked at the German soldier. He was an older man, perhaps fifty to

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sixty years old. He had a thick mustache shaved off on the sides, like Hitler's. His expression was one of contempt. He cursed when he discovered blood on his uniform. Their eyes met for a brief moment. All that she could see in his eyes was hate. He hated her and every Jew in the room. She wondered how a human being could do such terrible things to others. *What did this poor little child do to deserve such a terrible death? What did any of us do to deserve death or imprisonment?* While every Jewish woman and child in the room stood in shock and silence, the Germans and kapos systematically went about their business, as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. The German pulled the little girl up by one leg and threw her body against the far wall, where she hit with a thud and fell in a heap upon the floor. Then, the final act of humiliation happened. The German soldier waited until the door was opened. During this time, he ignored the substantial pool of blood that had leaked out of the girl's head. It was as though he was carrying a *thing* instead of a person. Finally, when the door was opened, he threw the child's body as far as he could across the room. Her body made a splattering sound when she hit the wet concrete floor. As he turned to come back through the room, Hanna saw a smile of satisfaction on the man's face.

Meantime, in the other camp, Jacob's left knee was shouting its pain out to him. There was very little talking, except for the kapos. Jacob wondered if he was nearing the moment of his death. As he reached the end of the holding area, he saw a very large door. The kapo Avrom told him that the showers were behind that door. Since others were already in that room, his group would have to wait for them to finish. Jacob trembled in the terror of his situation. *Here it comes! Walter told us that prisoners at death camps were told that they were going into a shower room. Instead of a shower, they were gassed to death! Dear God, please protect Rachael and our child. Please allow my parents to go on living. I now accept my death here as inevitable. I have tried to lead a good life.*

While waiting, Jacob surveyed the room. It was a surrealistic experience. Many of his fellow-Jews were emaciated. They had been starved for so long that they looked like a collection of talking human skeletons. Everyone looked different without hair. He searched for a way – any way – to get out. The only two doors were the one he used to enter and the thick door at the end of the shower room. There was no possible way to escape. *Perhaps I should grab one of the guard's guns and start shooting. Of course, they will shoot me. But, at least I won't die like a lamb going to slaughter!* In the cold, damp air, Jacob fought with how to end his life. It was his greatest moment of despair. He searched for a guard that seemed preoccupied.

Hanna also waited naked in the freezing holding area. Her head had been shaved and every opening in her body had been searched meticulously and brutally. Unlike those in Jacob's line, she had no tattoo. She saw that a large doorway was ahead and she was told that showers were behind that door. The women and children around her were weeping. Kapos and German soldiers constantly screamed at them and pushed them. The holding room was an atmosphere of controlled chaos. If there was one constant about this improbable scene, it was that there was no possible way to escape.

Amid the fear and chaos, a little naked girl approached Hanna. She was

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perhaps three years old. The toddler was shivering, but not crying. She had been quiet ever since they entered the building, sitting very still while her head was shaved. Hanna watched in amazement as the child obeyed each order without fear or apprehension. The child looked up at Hanna, and smiled. Hanna picked her up. While every other child sobbed or screamed, this little girl was calm and composed. Hanna quickly recognized that something about her was very unnatural. She seemed like an adult, trapped inside the body of a child. Hanna was astounded by the child's bravery. "What is your name?" asked Hanna.

The child looked up at Hanna with huge brown eyes and said, "My name is Ruth." They looked into each other's eyes for a moment in silence.

Then, Ruth softly spoke. "Don't worry. Soon you will be with our people." Hanna did not know what to say. *What does "our people" mean?* Finally, she said, "They say that we are going for a shower in the next room, my dear."

Of course, Hanna did not really believe that water was waiting for them in the room behind the great door. Nevertheless, she held Ruth close to her and tried to comfort her. Ruth pulled away for a moment and said, "Your family will treasure your memory." A tear fell from Ruth's right eye, falling on Hanna's left arm. It glistened in the still air for a moment. Hanna was bewildered. *Children do not speak like this.* Again, it was as though an adult was speaking through the body of this small child.

In a shaky voice, Hanna whispered, "I don't know where your mother is Ruth. But, I will take care of you now."

The child blinked a few times in the cold air before responding. Hanna noticed that the little girl had gorgeous, sparkling brown eyes, with long curled lashes. "My mommy went in a different line," replied the calm child.

Hanna was suddenly overcome by emotion. She loved Moshe and Jacob more than her own life. She had wanted a daughter after Jacob was born. However, she married late and had time for only one child. Now, with death near, she felt as though this was the daughter that she never had. Tears streamed down Hanna's cheeks. "Why are you crying?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, I miss my husband and my son," replied Hanna.

Suddenly, Ruth pulled back, looked in Hanna's eyes and said, "I will stay with you, so you won't miss them too much. I will be your daughter."

Hanna was astonished. *It was as though she read my mind! A three-year-old child is comforting me!* What kind of person was this intelligent and mature little girl? To Hanna, it seemed that Ruth was a gift from God. They held each other tightly for several minutes. Suddenly, the heavy gray door in front of them began to move. Its hinges squealed briefly while the monstrous door opened.

The kapos ushered Hanna, Ruth and the remaining women in the holding area into the shower room. The room had gray concrete walls with water pipes and fixtures. The floor was wet, but only slightly. Suddenly, Hanna noticed that there were no drains in the floor. The people behind were pushing forward strongly. Hanna could not resist if she wanted to. She was pushed until there was no more space between her and the far wall. She looked up and gazed at the plumbing and shower heads on the ceiling. She desperately wanted to believe that water would come out and that they would live. Still, the group pushed her forward, until

everyone's body was pressed against another body. Arms, legs and torsos continuously pushed and pressed, until the room was completely filled.

The room had a strange odor. She looked around and saw no other door, except the one she entered and the door at the far end of the room. Hanna also noticed that there were several cylindrical pillars in the room. Each pillar had a mesh opening from floor to ceiling, as though something was supposed to go inside of them, but not fall out onto the floor. After a few minutes and a great deal more pushing and shoving, the room became darker. The naked women and girls trembled, pressed against each other in the crowded room. Finally, the huge door lumbered closed. The hinges again made a squealing sound. There was a loud thud when it closed. Hanna could hear the door being bolted and locked on the other side. It was even darker now, with the large doorway closed.

Slowly, panic began to arise as the trapped women waited for water, or death. Everyone around Hanna was crying and shuddering. Their trembling bodies bumped against each other in the darkness, each one shaking with dread. The terrified women and children stared up at the showerheads. Some of the women began to pray.

Hanna looked down at Ruth. Although the room was dark, she could see Ruth's eyes, huge and sparkling in the gray darkness. She picked her up. Hanna stroked Ruth's back, crying softly. She thought about the life that she should have had in the future with Moshe. She prayed that Moshe and Jacob would survive. She knew how sad Moshe would be about her death. She wished Jacob and Rachael a wonderful life. Somehow, she was confident that Jacob would survive. She softly said good-bye to her beloved husband of twenty-five years. *Oh dear, sweet God, I love my Moshe so much. He is the heart of my heart. He and my precious Jacob are my life and my love. Dear Lord, please protect them. Allow them to find a way to survive. God, please hear my final prayer. Please accept my utter devotion.*

Then, from the depths of her prayer, Hanna thought that she heard Ruth say something that sounded like "seed." She looked down at the child, who resembled a bald cherub. "What did you say?" asked Hanna. She gazed into little Ruth's beautiful brown eyes.

Softly, the small child said, "Your seed will survive, Hanna." Hanna was astounded. *Here, in a room filled with death, in the very moments before death, this lovely little child is telling me something about my son's future. How can this be? Who is this child to be foretelling the future? How can this be true?* It was all too much to take, she thought, when suddenly something came clamoring down inside one of those peculiar pillars with holes. In a moment, several more pillars had something dropped down into them. A strange odor filled the room. The trapped women saw smoke coming from the pillars and began to scream, pushing against each other. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to get away from the pillars.

Hanna continued to hold and protect Ruth while being buffeted against the wall. She bounced off of several women and was slammed against the wall by other women. Some of the women closest to the pillars were now motionless on the floor. The screaming inside the room was deafening. Throughout the jostling

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and pushing, Hanna held tightly to Ruth. But the odor was upon her now and her throat was constricting. It smelled like chemicals. But it also smelled like something familiar. She couldn't quite place it. Finally, she thought that it smelled like some type of nut, perhaps walnut. Hanna thought that odd.

The chaotic room filled rapidly with the acrid gas. It was impossible to avoid breathing it. Ruth tightened her small arms around Hanna's neck. She suddenly whispered Hebrew prayers to Hanna. Hanna held Ruth tightly against her chest. The gas began to enter her lungs. It burned her mouth, her throat and lungs. The more she breathed, the more it burned. She noticed people falling all around her. Some of them had a rash or burn marks around their mouths. Everyone was coughing. Blood emerged from some of their mouths. Others had foam around their mouths and nostrils. She became very dizzy. Soon, Hanna found it difficult to stand. Her legs became unsteady. Her mind was no longer clear and sharp. She was getting groggy. Her throat and lungs felt like they were on fire. Tears were flowing down her cheeks. Looking up, she said hoarsely, "Moshe and Jacob, I love you so much! Dear God, please take care of them!"

Then, Ruth, with her small arms around Hanna's neck, whispered. "Hanna, you are a good woman. Thank you for giving us your Jacob. He will save many." Suddenly, despite the dizziness, everything came crashing together in perfect clarity for Hanna. This was not a child speaking to her. No child, no adult could be so completely composed during such a tragic and egregious slaughter of innocent life. This child could not possibly know about the angelic message from her husband's childhood that said, "Yours will save many." *It is impossible for her to know that! This is not a child, but an angel – sent here to show me the way to my eternal resting place!*

Hanna smiled and stroked Ruth's head and face affectionately. Amid the screaming, jostling and terror, she said softly, "God sent me this perfect little angel to help me go to heaven." A tear rolled down Hanna's face and fell on Ruth's arm. The cycle was complete. It too, glistened and sparkled, despite a lack of light. The tear seemed to hold its own warm light upon the child's arm. Hanna suddenly felt more at peace with herself and the world than at any time in her life. She smiled at Ruth.

Although she was dizzy and distraught, she observed that for a moment – just for a moment – Ruth's eyes glowed with a pure golden light. As she cherished that perfect thought, Hanna's mind faded into darkness. She fell against the wall and slipped slowly to the floor. By the time she had reached the floor, she had stopped breathing. Moments later, her heart stopped and she was dead. Her crime was that she was a Jew. Her final peaceful thought was that Jacob would truly go on and "save many."

Chapter 41

Life In Auschwitz

In the building where Jacob was waiting, there was much murmuring. “This is lit, my friend,” said a middle-aged man standing next to Jacob. He was short and somewhat overweight. His head was mostly bald and shining with sweat. He spoke in a rather irritating high pitched and raspy voice. “You heard the stories about showers that have no water. We’re about to be gassed to death.” The poor bald man was so anxious that he was actually walking in place. He apologized when he bumped into Jacob. “I just hope that my wife and children are spared. They were in the other line.” Tears popped out from his eyes, running down his face. He brushed them away quickly. Jacob lacked the courage to tell the man the truth about the other line.

Suddenly, the bald man was being hit repeatedly on the head by a stick. Blood poured down the side of his face from a scalp wound. Jacob turned to see who could be whipping a small, innocent, unarmed man. It was a kapo! A Jew was beating up another Jew, simply because the man had expressed his opinion about the camp’s purpose.

“Shut up you fat old bastard,” screamed the kapo at the nervous bald man. “I’ll make sure that you stop your filthy lies.” The kapo then set upon the bald man again with his stick. Without thinking, Jacob moved to shield the bald man from the hostile kapo. He put his hand up to ward off additional blows from the stick, shielding the bleeding man.

“NO MORE!” yelled Jacob, as he turned to face the kapo. The look of rage in Jacob’s face must have produced his desired result as the kapo looked at Jacob and backed away. Jacob bent over to help the poor man, who lay bleeding upon the cold concrete floor. “He won’t bother you again,” said Jacob softly.

The kapo quickly looked at the men nearby and put his stick down. “He better not talk again,” said the kapo, as he left.

Standing in the damp, musty building, Jacob was suddenly immersed in deep thought. *Why did I intervene? That is not like me at all. I have always been pretty much a coward. So, why did I risk everything for this total stranger? I do not even know this man! What happened to me?* Recognizing that some part of him that was sleeping had just awakened, Jacob struggled to identify who he was becoming. *I am changing! I can feel the change. From deep in my mind’s innermost recesses, I can feel that I am changing into a different person. The captivity, the beatings, the starvation, the depravation, the sickness and the loss of family – all are molding me into someone new. But to what end? What am I supposed to do here? God, if I am to do your bidding, please tell me what to do. Help me to be your instrument against evil. Show me the way.*

A new kapo entered the room and quickly made his way to the center. The middle-aged man looked exhausted and disheveled. His salt and pepper hair was

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nearly shaved to the skull. His face was haggard, with stubble of white beard. He spoke in brief, harsh tones. "My dear Jewish friends," he began in Yiddish. "We are also prisoners, like you. We experienced everything you have seen today. We beg you for your cooperation. In a moment, the SS will be walking in here. Each of you will be frisked, and thoroughly inspected. If anyone is discovered having any gold, silver, currency or valuables, he will either be shot on the spot, or hanged on this pole." He paused, to show us a pole standing in the middle of the barracks. Jacob had noticed it earlier, but never guessed its purpose. "Fellow Jews, be aware that yesterday there also arrived a large transport from Lodz, and the SS ended up hanging 15 Jews right here in this room. If anyone has any contraband with him, and will admit it right now, of his own free will, we will convince the SS not to punish him."

There was much murmuring in the room. The prisoners looked at each other and stole glances at the kapos surrounding them. It was likely that many of these terrified people kept valuables like jewelry on their person. Jacob helped the bald man close his wounds and apply pressure to the bleeding. He heard someone behind him say, "That was the bravest thing I've ever seen."

Another man pointed at Jacob and replied, "Yes, this man here put his own life on the line to help a perfect stranger." This was followed by an ongoing conversation about Jacob's heroics, which was passed along the long, winding line, from person to person. By the next day, Jacob's name had circulated around the camp, generating unanticipated respect and admiration.

Jacob felt embarrassed by his newfound respect. Yet, something deep inside told him that these poor people needed a leader. *Unless the Jews imprisoned here can find some way to stop the Germans, hundreds of thousands of Jews will be murdered.* This realization stirred him deeply. It was as though time had suddenly stopped for Jacob. He was changing and it frightened him. Although he was always well liked by his classmates, Jacob never desired a leadership role in school or among friends. As he matured, he had sometimes thought about volunteering for leadership positions. But, his natural shyness intervened. At the end of secondary school, Jacob finally felt as though he was breaking through his shyness.

But now, in this terrifying, ludicrous place, Jacob felt something strong tugging at his soul – pulling him into a role that he had never imagined. He felt as though the forces of the world were crushing him into a lump of coal, and he would die unless he became a diamond. His mind was a whirlwind of feelings. He had helped an innocent stranger and it felt good. It felt appropriate. *If I survive, I will dedicate my life to helping others in need.*

Suddenly the large group of naked men was being pushed forward again. This time, they were moved into a room in which there were many kapos with scissors and mechanical razors. Each man was held in place by one kapo while another one shaved his scalp. They had evidently been told to cut "all" of the prisoner's hair, as Jacob observed some men having hair cut from their shoulders, chests, back and even their loins. It was a humiliating experience for each of them.

Suddenly it was Jacob's turn. He was coarsely shoved in front of the razor

kapo. Another kapo held him in place while the first one grabbed a heavy silver mechanical razor and moved it towards Jacob's head. At first, it did not hurt. Suddenly, Jacob experienced a tremendous wave of sharp pain as the razor grasped and held a large flap of skin on Jacob's scalp. Searing pain raced across his head. The blades of the razor had locked in place with Jacob's scalp wedged between the razor's edges. To make matters worse, the kapo decided to yank the razor free. He pulled so hard that part of Jacob's scalp tore open.

Jacob screamed in agony. The pain was excruciating. Prodigious amounts of blood poured out from the scalp wound. It streamed upon Jacob's shoulders and ran down his naked back. Jacob noticed that the blood was remarkably warm upon his skin. He looked at the kapo holding the razor. He was very young. His frightened expression told Jacob that it was simply an accident. The young man blinked several times, still holding the frozen razor with a piece of Jacob's scalp still within its blades.

Finally, the man holding Jacob screamed at the youth. "Goldfarb, get the scissors!" The young man dropped the razor and grabbed a pair of scissors from a nearby table. Jacob screamed again in anguish. It felt as though someone had cut off the top of his head. Tears streamed down his face, mixing with the trails of bright red blood. He clenched his fists and ground his teeth in a spasm of horrific pain.

"Oh my God," exclaimed young Goldfarb, gazing at the bloody electric razor and then at Jacob's head. He saw something white at the bottom of the huge laceration. "Oh my God," he repeated with wide-open eyes. As he gazed into the wound that he created, he saw that Jacob's scalp had been cut to the bone.

Waves of pain overwhelmed Jacob. "Oh, God!" he screamed. His shoulders were completely red. Jacob's scalp wound continued to produce prodigious amounts of blood. Someone behind him yelled, "Forget it!" Jacob turned to see an older kapo grab the scissors from the youth's trembling hands. He pushed the wide-eyed but unmoving young man away and quickly cut Jacob's remaining hair with scissors. He avoided the blood-soaked flap of skin that flopped around as Jacob's head moved.

Jacob had continued to scream, although he was now losing strength. "Oh God," he repeated continuously. He was getting cold and dizzy.

"You won't die from it!" yelled the older kapo with scissors. He threw Jacob a piece of cloth. Push this on the wound until the bleeding stops. "Now move on!" he ordered. Goldfarb leaned against the wall in his own world of anguish. Jacob understood his pain. *He no more wanted to hurt me than I wanted to be hurt. He does not know how to do this, yet he is forced to do it. It is not his fault.*

With a sheepish expression, Goldfarb stuttered, "I... I am very... sorry. I am very sorry," as he handed Jacob a gray towel to place upon his bleeding scalp. Although he remained quiet, Jacob was howling inside from the pain. As he looked around the room, he saw other men with torn and bleeding scalps. There was blood everywhere. Yet, he realized how bad Goldfarb must feel. The poor young man looked as though he was about to go mad. He slowly sank down to the

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floor in despair. Jacob could almost feel the young man's pain. *The anguish must be torturing him!* For a moment, it was almost palpable.

Jacob had never been able to sense another person's pain, at least not so strongly as this. It delivered a powerful emotional reaction. And, while his pain was severe, his mind was on fire. *It was only for a moment, but I could feel his pain, as though it were my own! Oh dear God! What is happening to me? I think that ...that I... I am going mad!* Jacob saw that Goldfarb was looking at him and forced a smile. He instantly saw the relief in Goldfarb's eyes. His weak smile seemed to diminish the young man's discomfort. *I felt his relief! I could actually feel the sense of pain moderate! What am I changing into?*

In a daze, Jacob stumbled his way through the circus of horror. He used one arm to hold his torn scalp against his skull. He felt dizzy and nauseous. The pain continued to arrive in waves. Someone was holding him up. Clotted blood around his eyes made him virtually blind. *Who is helping me?* He stumbled ahead, still pressing his head wound. Suddenly, a tremendous pressure in the middle of his back forced Jacob to the ground. He turned around and wiped at his right eye with his hand, to move clotted blood away. A German soldier stood over him, glaring with a vicious grin. He had struck Jacob with the end of his rifle. The blow caused Jacob to momentarily lose feeling in his legs. They splayed out underneath him, as though they were completely useless. He tried desperately, but Jacob could not move his legs. He stared up at the powerful soldier, powerless to move.

The soldier glared down at Jacob with hatred in his eyes. *I cannot imagine what I have done to deserve this, but a quick death now is about as good as a slow death later – if not better.* Jacob was ready to die. Suddenly the soldier was called away by an SS officer. He looked back and forth between the SS man and Jacob. *He is trying to decide if he can get away with killing me in front of other Jews. It might spark a riot.* In fact, several strong Jewish men had observed Jacob's dilemma and now strode towards his location. He heard one of them say, "That's the young man who risked his life to help one of us." The SS officer noticed this and harshly ordered the soldier to abandon Jacob and return to his post. *I will live ten more minutes!* The soldier slapped Jacob's face hard enough to draw blood and stomped back to his nearby post.

Someone bent over Jacob and helped him to his feet. At first, his legs would not bear his weight. He was like a rag doll. Unable to stand, he leaned against the wall. He was still dizzy and now his nose was bleeding, in addition to his scalp. He had clotted blood in his right eye and could see nothing from it. Although feeling was returning to his legs, he was unable to hold himself up. *No matter. If I do not walk into the gas room, they will throw me in. Either way, I am a dead man! Oh Rachael, I love you!*

Jacob closed his eyes and enjoyed the bliss of darkness. Just when he was beginning to feel better, someone grabbed him by the shoulders. *It is that monster again, and he will throw me into the gas room.* With some effort, Jacob opened his left eye. He was not sure who he saw, so he wiped the blood out of his right eye and looked again. It was young Goldfarb. The young man who accidentally hurt Jacob now stood guard over him. He would protect Jacob with his

life. Looking into the young man's eyes, Jacob realized how dominant guilt could be. He was even more amazed to see the power of forgiveness. After a few minutes, feeling returned to his legs and Goldfarb helped him walk away.

Jacob looked down at the new tattoo on his left arm. He tried to read the numbers, but they were upside down to him. His entire back and left side was very painful from the rifle butt incident. He thought, for just a moment, at how he had admired men's tattoos when he was a child. He even asked for one when he was twelve. His mother put a stop to that idea quickly. "Gentlemen do not have tattoos," she exclaimed in no uncertain terms. He recalled looking at his father for support. Moshe only shook his head in disdain. Now that he didn't want it, he had one. Unlike the Star of David that he had been forced to wear on his clothing during the past five years, the tattoo seemed more a mark of shame. *The Germans like to humiliate us. To them, we are not humans but objects or numbers. We are vermin to them and they mean to exterminate us.*

Jacob's thoughts turned to Rachael and his parents. *Are they still alive? Will I see my wife and child?* And he heard muttering behind him. "They are going to kill us," someone grumbled. He was a scrawny young man of perhaps twenty. With wild brown hair and wide open eyes, he looked frantic to Jacob. "My friend, he told me about these places. The Germans have them all over Eastern Europe. They call them 'concentration camps.' And when you go in, you will never come out!"

An older man behind him chuckled, "Then how did your friend get out?" Jacob thought that comment might have been funny – anywhere else. His heart skipped a beat as he realized that so many others had warned him about this in the past year. Jacob remembered four distinct times when he was told about death camps. Each time, the news gave him chills. And each time, it seemed so easy to put the thought away – to disbelieve or to consider the implications later. With a start, Jacob realized that the time to protect himself, Rachael and his parents had come and gone. If only his father had taken the warnings more seriously!

Then, the large door to the shower room was opened. Jacob, surrounded by fifty others, moved slowly into the shower room. It was a large, rectangular concrete room. A brick wall divided the room into two equal sides. The walls were painted pale green. He observed plumbing and showerheads on the ceiling of one side. There were drain holes in the floor. His heart was pounding. He could hear blood pumping through his ears. Jacob quietly spoke to no one in particular, "Is this end of my life?" There was no answer. As more and more people entered, Jacob was pushed farther and farther towards the back wall.

The kapos used their sticks to intimidate the prisoners, whipping men at will. Finally, all of the prisoners were moved into one side of the building. The kapos and some SS officers were on the other side. Jacob had no idea what they were doing on that side, but it did not seem to make sense to push more than 100 men into one cramped side, when only a handful of Germans and kapos were on the other side.

Suddenly, the water pipes in the ceiling began to moan. The sound initially terrorized everyone in the room. They trembled underneath the sound. A man in front said to another man, "I heard that they gas Jews to death in rooms that look

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like showers.” Jacob had heard that rumor at least a dozen times. He heard some of the men retching and vomiting. Jacob felt something warm on his right foot. Looking down, he saw that the man standing next to him had urinated upon Jacob’s leg. The man was trembling uncontrollably. His eyes were wild and desperate. Many men were praying. He heard the *Shema* repeatedly, as the men prepared for death.

As the pipes continued to groan, some of them seemed to be shaking. *If they are shaking, could water be coming?* Although Jacob was very frightened, he felt something encouraging deep inside. He suddenly felt certain that he would not die here. He could not explain it, but it did not coincide with his new dreams of death. In those dreams, he was in a strange land, with mountains and deserts. There were bad people in his dream... people who wanted to kill him. But they did not speak German. In fact, Jacob was certain that they spoke some form of Arabic.

And then, like a blessing in return for their prayers, water came out from one of the showerheads near the back of the room. Then, another showerhead came to life, this one closer to Jacob. Then more and more showerheads came to life. Finally, the showerhead above Jacob began to spurt sheets of cold water down upon him. Many of the men began to cry. Each of them understood that they had a new lease on life. And even though they still suspected that one day the Nazis would kill them, they would live on past today. For each of those men, it was a small miracle.

The water was freezing. However, Jacob thought that it was the sweetest, most perfect water that he had ever felt. The cold water rained down upon Jacob’s naked body, washing away blood from his scalp and tears of joy from his cheeks. *I will live! I will live on.* It made no difference that the cold water made his torn scalp scream with pain. It was a moment to be treasured.

After the shower, Jacob stood in line for a disinfectant powder. Kapos used small hand shovels to distribute a whitish powder upon the new prisoners. Some of the powder went into his torn scalp. It stung horribly. Jacob let out a brief scream and was punched in the face for his expression of pain. Blood poured down into his mouth and out from his nostrils. He used the small cloth that the kapo had given him to wipe some of the blood from his face. However, the towel had already been saturated with blood from his scalp wound.

Another cadre of kapos entered and forced the men to walk into a new building. Like the one they just left, this was a large red brick building, with a brick wall that traversed the center. But this building was different; a horrible stench of sulfur permeated the room. On the other side of the brick wall, there was a large pool filled with black water. The smell of sulfur came from that pool. The kapos used their sticks to force prisoners into the water. “Silence!” A grotesque middle-aged kapo was screaming at them. His face was twisted into a sneer so malicious that the man resembled a horribly evil creature. These kapos were crueler. They repeated the same message. “Each of you will enter the pool and cover yourself with the dark water.” Jacob had no idea what was in the water, but he suspected that it was not good for his wound. “You will dip your entire head under the water. If you do not dip your entire head under water, you

will be shot.”

Stepping into the cold, dark, foul-smelling water was very difficult. Most of the men were retching. Some were vomiting. The stench of sulfur was overpowering. Kapos used their whips and sticks to force the men to put their heads underwater. Jacob splashed some of the water over his body. The stench was disgusting. It went in Jacob's nostrils and into his lungs. The thick, black solution felt horrible and it was freezing cold. Suddenly, a whip struck his back. It stung badly. He turned to see a kapo who was screaming at him. “Put your head underwater young man,” yelled the kapo in Yiddish. Jacob looked at the older man who had hit him.

“Please,” cried Jacob. “My scalp is torn and I'm still bleeding. This liquid can't be very good for me if it gets into my bloodstream.” Jacob showed the kapo the torn skin and hair. The kapo looked around the room to see if anyone was monitoring the conversation.

“What's your name?” asked the kapo.

“Jacob,” he replied. The kapo again looked nervously around the room.

“Well my name is Edward. And today, you may go on your way without dipping your head. But you must at least pretend that you are doing it.” Reluctantly, Jacob bent over and tried to make it appear that his head was under the fetid solution. The solution was so foul-smelling that Jacob began to retch. “Move on,” yelled the kapo.

The men were then issued the same red and white striped pajamas that Jacob saw in his horrible nightmare. The size given to them rarely matched the person, resulting in a group of men with ill-fitting clothing. There resulted a mad exchange of clothes, with men attempting to find someone else who had their size. Even after exchanging them amongst themselves, they were too short or too long, too big or too little.

Putting on the striped clothing that he had seen in his dream was a terrifying experience for Jacob. He realized that his nightmare was a sign from God. He had been allowed, during the dream, to see into the future. Jacob had trouble grasping the concept in his mind. *It could not have happened by chance. I was given a glimpse of the future for a reason! But what is the precise reason? What am I to do? What is God's plan for me?* More than anything else, Jacob thought, I no longer wish to know the future. “Please God,” he prayed. “Change my future. I don't want to die next to that horrible fire.” And then it dawned on him. He understood that it would be up to him to change the future. Unless he wanted to be shot in the head next to that terrible furnace, he would have to create a plan. Jacob quickly walked out of the stinking mass of swirling black water, passing behind Edward. “Thank you,” whispered Jacob as he bent forward to get out.

Whenever someone spoke without permission, one of the kapos hit him. This is the beginning of our new training, thought Jacob. *I am turning into one of them! Like animals, we are to quickly obey all of their orders.* So far, Jacob had not seen anyone hit a kapo. The kapos always ordered men to do something when German soldiers carrying rifles and pistols were standing behind them. Then, the kapos could be as brave as they preferred.

The men were finally marched to their new barracks in a sub-camp called

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Monowitz. Jacob's new friend, Chaim, became his teacher. There was so much to learn about this complex and terrifying place. Jacob learned that Auschwitz was not one camp, but three. Auschwitz, the original camp, was built for both labor and extermination. The second camp, Birkenau, was constructed on the site of the village of Brzezinka, roughly 4 km from the main camp. This massive camp was originally intended to be filled with captured Russian POWs who would provide the slave labor to build the SS "utopia" in Upper Silesia. The chemical giant I. G. Farben expressed an interest in utilizing this labor force, too. Now, it was filled with Jews from all over Europe.

By the end of 1943, the prisoner population of the main camp (Auschwitz), Birkenau, Monowitz and other sub-camps was over 80,000. Up to 50,000 prisoners were scattered around 51 sub-camps such as Rajsko, an experimental agricultural station, and Gleiwitz, a coal mine. From late 1941 to October 1942, the mortuary at Auschwitz main camp, which was already equipped with a crematorium, was adapted as a gas chamber. In the spring of 1942, two provisional gas chambers at Birkenau were constructed out of peasant huts, known as the 'bunkers'. The twin pairs of gas chambers were numbered II and III, and IV and V. The first opened on March 31, 1943, the last on April 4, 1943. The capacity of these crematoria was 4,420 people.

Those selected to die were undressed in the undressing room and then pushed into the gas chambers. It took about 20 minutes for all the people to die. In II and III, the killings took place in underground rooms, and the corpses were carried to the five ovens by an electrically operated lift. Before cremation, gold teeth and other valuables, such as rings, were removed from the corpses. This work was done by the Sonderkommando, supervised by the SS. In IV and V the gas chambers and ovens were on the same level, but the ovens were so poorly built and the usage was so great that they repeatedly malfunctioned and had to be abandoned. The corpses were finally burned outside, in the open. Jewish Sonderkommandos carried tens of thousands of bodies, throwing them into the burning pits. This was done under SS supervision.

There were up to seven gas chambers using Zyklon-B poison gas and three crematoria. Birkenau included a camp for new arrivals and those to be sent on to labor elsewhere; a Gypsy camp; a family camp; a camp for holding and sorting plundered goods and a women's camp. Monowitz provided slave labor for the I. G. Farben synthetic rubber plant. Almost 2.5 million people were killed there; 2 million were Jews, and the others were Poles, Gypsies and Russian prisoners. Monowitz was completed just a few months before Jacob's arrival, as an Arbeitslager (forced labor camp). It housed tens of thousands of prisoners, mostly for the I. G. Farben plant.

The kapos taught the new prisoners how to assemble for roll call in front of their barracks. Each man had to stand in precisely the correct spot and at precisely the correct distance from the man in front, to the side and behind. They were told to prepare for assembly at any-and-all times. While men died every day, a change in the prisoner count for any other reason was considered very serious. There would be hell to pay if someone was missing, but not dead. Jacob thought how it might instead be a blessing. *No human being should be submitted*

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to this. Not even murderers.

The kapos were deathly afraid of any German, regardless of rank. They cowered when a German was near, looking straight down at the ground. Kapos never looked a Nazi in the eyes. In the presence of a German, they bowed their shoulders forward, making themselves appear frail and impotent. As Jacob continued to observe the culture of Auschwitz, he made mental notes of potential weak points. He would never stop trying to escape. And if escape were impossible, he would somehow destroy the Nazi infrastructure. Jacob's mind whirled continuously. *One day, I promise, I will kill many of these cursed Nazis.*

Finally, when he thought that he could stand up no longer, Jacob was shown to his "bunk bed." The barracks was packed with so many men that Jacob would have to sleep in a very cramped position. There were three men in a space meant for one. Therefore, each man had to sleep sideways, with arms and legs dangling off of the sides. Instead of a mattress, Jacob discovered that he had to sleep upon a mat made from straw. He looked around the room. Each bunk bed was filled with the same material. "Oh no," cried Jacob. A deep voice behind him replied, "What's the matter, kid?"

Jacob squirmed around to see who had spoken. To his great surprise, it was the friendly, strong kapo who had helped him upon arrival. "My name is Chaim," the man said, while extending his hand. Jacob shook his hand. "Jacob Silverman. I'm from Austria."

The horror of the day had taken its toll upon Jacob. But as he lay upon his portion of the cot, his mind again traveled to his family. *Where is Rachael? How is the baby? Where is his father? And what happened to mother?* This bothered Jacob the most. She was so thin and frail, with sunken eyes – all from her recent bout with typhus. If she did not appear strong enough to work, would they keep her alive? Jacob cried himself to sleep. But underneath the despair, a new, strong anger was rising. When the sleeper awakens, he will be a new person. Like a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly, so was Jacob changing into something different – something new.

It took almost four hours for Jacob to stop the scalp wound from bleeding. The top of his new "uniform" was already bloody. He finally drifted off into a frail and broken sleep. He dreamed about his parents and Rachael. They were going to the hospital for Rachael's delivery. In the dream, the four of them were walking to the Salzburg Hospital in bright sunlight. There was something odd about the sunlight. It was painfully bright. Jacob had to shield his eyes. It was also very cold. Each breath came out as a frosty swirl of wispy air. As they reached the hospital, Rachael's father joined them, with Rachael's sister, Anna. They walked hand in hand, smiling. Jacob noticed a strange aura around Ariel, Anna and his mother. It was akin to a glow that surrounded their faces and bodies. Rachael and Moshe looked normal. There was no aura surrounding them.

They walked along empty sidewalks and entered an empty hospital. The entire hospital was white. The walls, ceilings, counters and even the floors were all bright white. There was no one to be seen. Soon, they were in the birthing room. There was one doctor and one nurse, standing underneath an impossibly

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bright light that hung from the ceiling. They too, were sheathed in white. Their eyes resembled dark stones, reflecting light but without emotion. Jacob again had to shield his eyes. It was too painful to see. Rachael's legs were placed into stirrups on the table. Soon, she was screaming. With each scream, Jacob moved closer. He observed movements underneath the skin of Rachael's vastly distended belly. "My child," he said softly. Ariel, Anna and his mother stood around the table, staring into space. Like automatons, they lacked any semblance of emotion or recognition. They did not speak or move. *Are they my family, or some sort of living mannequins?*

Suddenly, the child's head emerged underneath the bright surgical light. Gazing at the baby, Jacob realized that the child already had thick hair, mostly covered by mucous. The delivery continued, and Jacob noticed that the baby was a boy. "My son," he thought to himself. Then, as the legs popped out, the doctor held the baby up to the light. Simultaneously, a nurse used a towel to wipe the mucous from the child's head. In this bright, artificial light, it was plainly clear to Jacob that the baby had a thick growth of blonde hair. When the baby was wrapped and presented to him, he noticed that the child had bright blue eyes. Jacob was drowning in conflicting emotions. He was thrilled to be a father. Yet, he knew in his heart that this child was not his. *How can this be?* Jacob knew that Rachael would never be with another man. Yet, there was no way that Jacob could be this child's father. He gave the child back to the nurse with no expression. Suddenly, his scalp screamed out in pain. He woke up in the dark, stinking barracks. Someone had shifted position and hit his head. It began to bleed again, Jacob noticed, as the warm dark fluid again flowed across his face.

Jacob tossed and turned all night. He could not acclimate to the crowded and fetid conditions inside the barracks. Whenever one man turned, two others were awakened. Men were constantly coughing. In some cases, the coughing was so severe that Jacob was certain that the man could not live much longer. His head hurt all the time. Whenever he moved, it felt like a new tear across his scalp. His arm hurt where it had been tattooed. His left knee throbbed. The pain seemed to go on forever, as did the humiliation from being tattooed. But, above his physical pain, Jacob was tortured by his dream. *Why would I dream about our child looking like that? Is there something about the child that I should know?*

Time passed and Jacob learned how to stay alive at Auschwitz. He was assigned to work in the rubber factory near the camp, along with the rest of the men in his barracks. The days and weeks passed by much more slowly than Jacob could imagine. It was now almost three years since he and his family were forced to abandon their beautiful home in Salzburg. It now felt a thousand miles away. He dreamt of his life that could have been – his life at university and beyond. Each time, he woke up hungry and in pain.

Every minute of every day, Jacob was hungry. The meager prison meals of rotting garbage and slop provided little in terms of nutrition or calories. Each minute was a painful reminder of the Nazis' vindictiveness. Jacob worked in the rubber plant, walking almost two kilometers each direction. The men in his barracks were awakened at 4:30 in the morning for roll call. Then, they had fifteen

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minutes to go to the mess hall, finish their meager breakfast, and return for second roll call. Jacob's group was then force-marched to and from the rubber plant. His knee throbbed and he limped badly when walking to and from the plant. At work, Jacob had to stand next to his machine virtually all day, after which his group was force-marched back to the camp.

The agony of hunger was relentless; its pain a constant companion. Jacob's weight dropped precipitously. His days were reduced to constant agony. His nights offered little lasting sleep and the torture of dreadful nightmares. This routine was never changed in any way. Six days a week, like clockwork, the prisoners performed the same acts for their captors. They stood outside for roll call and marched to and from the factory whether it was oppressively hot, or dangerously cold. They had no coats to protect them from the cold. And Jacob watched as men near him fell to the ground every day. One by one, men weakened by disease, starvation, tremendous heat and freezing cold hit the ground. And, like so much rubbish, they were collected in carts and wheelbarrows, then fed into the fire with the new prisoners who failed to pass muster. Sometimes one of the fallen men would be Jacob's friend. Each time this happened, Jacob cried, for there was nothing that he could do to help them. If a man fell to the ground and was still conscious, one of the SS guards would stroll past and shoot him.

There was only one inspiring moment. In late June, a rumor was spread that the British and Americans had invaded Europe. It was told that they had attacked German positions all along the Atlantic coast and at a beach in France called "Normandy." And, although they had endured tens of thousands of casualties, the Allies were on the march towards Germany. Some now said that the Allies would capture Europe within weeks. Other rumors told of extended German supply lines in Russia and that the Americans were airlifting tanks to the Russians. Although no one prisoner claimed to have a radio, so many people were talking about the invasion that Jacob believed it had to be true. He prayed that the Allies would rescue them soon. He was not convinced that he could live much longer before being killed or dying from disease and starvation. Yet, time continued to move on. And, the Allies – it was told – were bogged down some place in Holland. New rumors told of a bad defeat. The Allies made a strategic mistake and had to retreat. As 1943 reached its final weeks, there was no rescue in sight.

Jacob was constantly amazed by the SS capacity for brutality. Most of them were sadistic and vicious. Jacob assumed that these men were selected for such work because of their crusty character and because they demonstrated a willingness to perform acts of frightening cruelty. The kapos, who lurked always in the background, often mimicked the guards. They copied the guard's spitefulness. Many of them became as vindictive as their German masters. Jacob suspected that such men had little or no conscience. Yet, Jacob noticed that some kapos appeared more humane with prisoners. He came to believe that guards who were less sadistic oversaw the more humane kapos. Certainly, not all of the kapos were ruthless. Some, such as Goldfarb, were good people forced by circumstance to perform wicked acts. Jacob had always believed that he would take his own life before becoming a kapo. Now, he was not so certain.

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Jacob awoke suddenly one cold night. He was scratching his head. Something was irritating his scalp. It burned and stung, at the same time that it itched. Jacob had never felt anything quite like it. Suddenly, he felt something tiny squirm in his fingers. Jacob jumped entirely off of his mattress and screamed. *What is that thing between my fingers!* “Oh my God,” he said. “Something’s in my hair! “It’s moving in my fingers!” This plea for help was met with much laughter. Some of the prisoners admonished Jacob for waking them. Then, Jacob felt an arm upon his shoulder. It was Chaim. He whispered into Jacob’s ear.

“Jacob, you just have lice. If you’re fortunate enough to remain alive here, you get lice. We all have them.” Jacob attempted to comprehend what was happening. Of course, he knew about lice. He had learned about them in school. But only poor people had lice, he thought. It was considered a mark of someone you should not be near, he remembered. And now here he was – with lice.

“I thought that I had hit rock bottom,” Jacob whispered to Chaim. “But this is worse. I’ve been reduced to an animal.” Not normally prone to feeling sorry for himself, Jacob now fought tears.

In the silence, Chaim spoke. His voice was soft, yet firm. His reassuring tone had changed from friendly to matter of fact. But Jacob was drifting away. In his mind, he was home, in Salzburg. The house smelled of apple strudel. His mother was bringing it to the dining room table from the kitchen. Jacob sat curled upon a large soft sofa next to a roaring fire in the parlor. A heavy snow was falling and the windows were frosted with ice. The wind whistled outside of their windows. Branches of a large fir tree scratched the glass. Jacob’s father sat in a large dark red leather chair on the other side of the fireplace, reading the newspaper and smoking his pipe. The house was cozy and warm. “You are not an animal, Jacob. You have a good mind.” Jacob straightened up from his lounging position. “Yes father.” Then, an arm pushed him gently backwards. He looked up and saw that it was Chaim. He whispered to Jacob. “The Nazis can torture and kill us. They can take our jobs, our houses, our money, even our family heirlooms. But, they can never take away this.” Chaim pointed to his head. Then, he grabbed Jacob’s arms with his hands, in an emotional gesture. “Jacob, they can never take away your soul. That belongs to God.”

Jacob thought about what Chaim was saying. He realized that it was true. *Everything that we have lost is meaningless, compared with our soul – our consciousness.* Chaim was right. And it made Jacob feel stronger. “Do you have a comb?” Chaim sat in front of him, with his hand extended. Jacob thought for a moment.

“My comb was lost with my trousers. I’m sorry.”

Chaim thought about this for a moment. There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Chaim seemed to be in deep thought. Finally he spoke. “All right. You can use my comb. But you’ll have to clean every single louse off of it before you return it.”

Jacob said, “Fine.” He put his hand out for the comb.

Chaim seemed confused for a moment, and then chuckled. “Turn around, you idiot! Someone else must perform this for you. Unless, that is, you can see the back of your head!” Several nearby men laughed at this. Jacob was very

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embarrassed. At the same time, he was grateful for the assistance. Big, strong Chaim still had his soul. And it was a very good one.

Like the pain in his abdomen from starvation, the stinging, throbbing pain in Jacob's left knee was now a constant companion. He knew that his knee required surgery after his capture. Now, it felt like bone was crunching into bone whenever he applied weight upon it. When he accidentally twisted his left knee, he would spend the next five minutes writhing in pain upon the ground. During those episodes, the pain was so severe, that Jacob wished for death. He prayed that he would not twist his knee when he was being marched to or from the factory. For a long time, he was fortunate and his knee never twisted. But such luck cannot last forever.

And time passed again, although in small measure. Fall moved into winter. The trees lost their leaves. And each day, shipments of new prisoners arrived. Jacob worked and walked and lined up for roll call. There were rumors of German defeats in Russia. Some said that the camp would be rescued by the Russian army before the first snow of the year. Others said that the British and Americans were making progress. 1944 arrived with a snowstorm. The Germans got drunk. The prisoners continued to starve.

Winter brought its bone-chilling cold to the rugged survivors at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sometimes, Jacob could hear the roar of hundreds of Allied bombers, on their way to destroy the German war machine. They sounded like a thousand freight trains high in the atmosphere, barreling towards the German infrastructure. And yet, the bombers never dropped as much as one bomb at Auschwitz. Each time that Jacob heard the Allied bombers, he realized how important it was to tell the Allies about Auschwitz. He promised himself to collect information about this death camp and find a way to get the information to the Allies. It had become a compulsion. He dedicated his life to its cause. Only by bombing Auschwitz could the Allies stop the mindless killing.

The fury of winter lost its grip upon the landscape as time marched on. Jacob managed to survive another frigid season as a prisoner of the German Reich. In late February, he received a brief message from his father. He told Jacob that he was alive and well, and that he had been assigned to perform autopsies for the German doctors and scientists. He found this work agreeable in the sense that he was not doing the killing. Still, it broke his heart to see so many thousands of people killed through starvation and experimentation. He understood that Jacob was alive and working in the rubber factory. He asked Jacob to pray for the soul of his dear mother. And, he prayed that Jacob would remain alive.

One morning in early January, Jacob was marching home after another long day at the munitions plant. The weather was miserable. Two recent storms had battered much of Europe. The first storm left record amounts of snow in the Alps. The camp was covered in deep snow. Some buildings were almost obscured by huge drifts. The second storm started as snow, turned into rain, and then back to snow, before temperatures plummeted. This meant that ice was under the snow and walking was treacherous. Worse yet, stones were scattered across the road everywhere. Now, they were covered by ice and snow. The

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stones could no longer be seen. Jacob's heart sank as he realized that his chances of making it safely back to the camp were poor. He laughed briefly, recognizing that he desperately wanted to return to a place where he would be tortured and then killed. "What a world," he said out loud.

"Isn't that the truth," someone said behind him. But Jacob did not dare turn to look at the man, for fear of slipping and falling.

The trip back to the camp seemed endless. The temperature was well below freezing. A light snowfall had covered everything. Jacob heaved a sigh of relief whenever he saw solid ground ahead of them. But his eyes were usually down, upon the road. *Don't slip. Don't walk on ice. Stay away from puddles.* Jacob's heart was pounding. Despite the freezing temperature, he was sweating. Something happened near the front of the column. There was a rush of German guards to a spot on the side of the road. Suddenly, a gunshot rang out – followed by another. Jacob's body tensed with the first shot. "Aaah," he said involuntarily.

They continued on, past the body of the man who had been shot. He was an old man, with a much wrinkled face and short white beard. He looked like skin and bones underneath his striped prisoner uniform. Bright red blood covered the pure white snow underneath his head. His eyes were wide open, staring at the gray sky, oblivious to the snowflakes that fell into his eyes. Jacob heard someone say that the old man was a Rabbi. This was not a fitting death for a holy man who helped so many others deal with the death of loved ones. Moments later, two kapos picked up the Rabbi and threw his sagging, lifeless body onto a small cart, pulled by a horse. Jacob glanced at the horse and wondered how it might taste. *So, this is what it's like at the very bottom of humanity. You watch a starving Rabbi killed only because he fell to the ground and had trouble standing up. And all you can think about is food.* Jacob felt ashamed of himself. He prayed that he would be allowed to walk back to the camp. And, at least that day, his prayer was rewarded.

In his bunk that evening, in the freezing barracks, Jacob looked at the men around him. Most of them were coughing or wheezing. Virtually everyone had one disease or another. Waves of typhus and tuberculosis had severely reduced the camp's population. In a state of severe starvation, one's body is incapable of defending itself. Day by day, Jacob's barracks was reduced by disease and starvation. Yet, there was no shortage of replacements. The hunger that gnawed upon him was relentless. Each and every moment, Jacob's stomach hurt from food deprivation. He thought about nothing else. Sometimes he was beaten by other prisoners, so that they could take away his meager portion of food. It reminded Jacob of being beaten by the dark-suited youth of Salzburg. They beat him for being a Jew. Now, Jews beat him for his food. He lay shivering on his flea-infested bunk, curled into a fetal position and starving. Still, Jacob vowed to stay alive long enough to escape or damage the German war machine. Sometimes it seemed as though anger alone kept him alive. Anger and the thought of Rachael kept him alive. She and their child were out there somewhere. He had to find them. *If it is the last thing that I do, I will find you Rachael. I swear that I will find you!*

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On one terribly cold day in February, Jacob was beaten by prisoners from another barracks who stole his breakfast gruel. This time, they also took Jacob into the lavatory and threw his beaten and wasting body into a large metal tub underneath the water faucets. They then turned the water on, soaking Jacob. He pulled himself out and shook off as much water as he could. It was so cold that steam came off of Jacob's body, dissipating into the air. *I have to get in line for the factory. If I don't, the Nazis will kill me. And, I have no other clothes to wear.* He limped as fast as possible to the parade ground in front of his barracks. Water was inside his shoes now. It was freezing. Each step was excruciating. Jacob could barely feel his frozen feet. Yet, he forced himself to report for work and the long walk to the factory. As he walked past the prisoners who beat him, they laughed and whispered to each other. *I'm alone in this nightmarish place, with no one to help me survive.* The footing had become more perilous, due to the formation of ice on top of the muddy road.

The walk seemed endless as the long line wound itself across open fields and past a tall stand of huge oak trees. Jacob's wet body was soon encased in a thin sheet of ice. His limbs grew numb. His body made a cracking sound when he walked as the ice broke in various places. Each step was exceedingly painful. It was pure torture. Finally, the factory was in sight. Jacob glanced up toward the sky, in appreciation. A snowflake wafted gently down into his eye and melted instantly. But, at the same moment, his right foot stepped on something tall and slippery. It was a rock. He lost his balance and started to fall. Out of instinct, Jacob planted his left leg to catch his body's weight. In that swift instant, he felt something tear inside of his left knee. His knee turned outward at an impossible angle. Jacob screamed in agony and fell into the icy mud of the road. He grabbed his left knee and writhed in pain.

The pain in Jacob's left knee was ghastly. He was sickened by the way that his knee was now loose and moving in improbable directions. It was impossible to bear weight on it. Quickly, two people scooped up Jacob's body and began to carry him into the factory. A nearby kapo simply stared at them. Jacob glanced at the nearest German guard. The guard was on horseback and it was difficult to see his face. As he came closer, Jacob saw that he was older, perhaps in his fifties or sixties. He had gray hair around his temples and crow's feet around his eyes. Jacob wondered how many elderly Germans were in the army. The guard opened his mouth to say something. He suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. He stopped his horse and stared in Jacob's direction, motionless. It was odd, Jacob thought. The German was just staring at him. His right hand flinched and twitched as he opened the holster that held his pistol. *This is it. He is going to kill me!* Jacob remained silent. One of the men who carried him was speaking very softly. At first, Jacob thought that the man was mumbling in a language he did not recognize. But soon Jacob began to recognize some words. The man was speaking Hebrew with a strange accent. Turning his neck sharply, Jacob saw that the man who was speaking Hebrew was the old Rabbi from his barracks, Samuel.

The guard approached with his pistol in his right hand. He seemed slightly dazed. Meanwhile, the old Rabbi continued chanting in Hebrew. To Jacob, it seemed as though the Rabbi was chanting directly at the German soldier. *Why*

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would he do that? The German has no idea what he is saying. Yet, incredibly, the chanting seemed to have mesmerized the German. Instead of shooting Jacob, the soldier seemed incapable of any action. He was like a stone statue, staring at the Rabbi.

It was the strangest moment of Jacob's life. *What mysterious power does this old Rabbi have over a soldier with a gun?* Suddenly, the guard holstered his pistol and mounted his horse. He trotted on to the factory without saying a word. Jacob was stunned. He looked around and saw that everyone nearby was staring at the Rabbi, who continued to chant. *This is the most incredible moment of my life!* The frail, blue-eyed Rabbi, with long white hair, had saved him by chanting! It was beyond comprehension. Much later, the Rabbi told him that he had learned how to mesmerize people through something he called "Kabala." Jacob admitted that he had never heard of it. The Rabbi described it as learning how to decipher the "code" underneath the words of the Torah, and other important Hebrew texts. To Jacob, it sounded like magic.

Carrying him on his other side was Chaim. Jacob wondered why Chaim and the Rabbi would risk their own lives in order to help him. It took a great deal of courage to stand between a Nazi's bullet and another Jew. Jacob had rarely seen it happen. And then, it was someone who desired death. *I am not a relative or even a close friend. Why did they risk their lives for me?* Jacob felt that their courage was a splendid act of humanity. But, it had to be more than that. *Did they save me because they understand my purpose?*

All morning, Jacob had to operate his factory machine while leaning against a nearby post. Had he been unable to work, he would already be dead. At lunchtime, he approached Chaim and Samuel. "Rabbi," he asked quietly. "Why did you save me today? Why did you risk your life?" The Rabbi and Chaim looked at each other and smiled.

Then, in his soft, sing-song voice, the Rabbi told him something that he would never forget. "My son," he began in almost a whisper. "You have been chosen to lead us. Your life is precious and important to us. We cannot allow you to die. Neither will God allow you to die."

Jacob stared at the diminutive Rabbi. His old blue eyes sparkled with vibrancy. For a moment, Jacob believed that his words and actions were divinely inspired. *Could it be true? Now, strangers are showing me the same vision that my family has held, since the words of that "angel" fell upon the ears of my father, when he was a child. Have I been chosen? And yet, I am a cripple! I cannot walk by myself. How can I be a leader for thousands of people?* Jacob managed a hoarse "thank you," to both men. After work that day, they carried Jacob all of the way back to their barracks. Inside, Jacob asked the Rabbi what he said to the guard that saved him. The Rabbi smiled and winked at him. Then he turned around and walked away, leaving Jacob to ponder the mystery.

In that brief time, Jacob had gone from a worker to an invalid – from a productive person to a deadbeat. But luck was on Jacob's side. The next day was Sunday. And there was almost never work on Sunday. By Monday morning, Jacob had fashioned a crutch by breaking part of a doorway apart in the barracks. It was too sharp to place underneath his arm. But it served quite well as a cane.

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Luckily, the guards said nothing to Jacob about his injury. He was barely able to keep up with his work at the munitions factory. The pain from his left knee was agonizing. He came close to fainting several times during roll call. Standing in one place was worse than walking, when he could place his weight mostly on his healthy leg. He was beginning to realize that his wound would be with him for the rest of his life. But, he was still alive and he could still stand and walk – even if he required a cane.

The weeks passed by, as Jacob's knee healed slowly. Still, Jacob was more thin and vulnerable than ever. He couldn't shake the feeling that the old Rabbi was protecting him. Chaim and Samuel seemed always to be nearby, watching over him. Each day, Jacob prayed for the health of his father and his beloved Rachael. Each night he prayed for the soul of his mother. And each new day brought more suffering. The old Rabbi must have spoken to Jacob's tormentors, because they never attacked him again. *What sort of control can he hold over powerful men? I must learn more about this "Kabala."*

Chapter 42

Birth And Death

Rachael awoke and, although groggy, tried to push herself up. She was on a bed with rails in a white hospital room. Above her bed was a huge, bright white light. In the distance, through a doorway, she observed Christmas decorations and lights. She tried to sit up, but was seized by an enormous contraction. She screamed in agony. *Where am I? Is this a hospital? How did I get here?*

“Please lie down Mrs. Schmidt.” The female voice from behind the bed spoke Polish. Rachael turned her head, but still could not see who spoke to her. The world again began to swim and fade away. When it returned, she had no idea how much time had passed. A young thin nurse was standing at her side. “Please, Helga, lie still,” she said in Polish. “The doctor is on the way. You were in a very bad auto accident.” She heard a man speaking in the background. He too spoke Polish. She could not understand what he was saying. Suddenly, a large rubber mask was placed over her face. It smelled of rubbing alcohol. “Breathe deeply,” the nurse admonished in a stern tone. The world turned gray and began to fade rapidly. Then, all was blackness.

Rachael awoke with a start. She was in a different room. A large wooden cross, with attached statue of Jesus, was upon the wall facing her. There were Christmas decorations outside the room. Christmas music was playing somewhere out in the hallway. Instantly, she realized that her labor was over. The child that had been growing inside her for nine months was no longer there. She screamed briefly. *My God! Where is my baby?* It was a very strange feeling, with the baby gone. She was also very light-headed and dizzy. *How long was I unconscious? Did I say anything to them that might reveal who I am?* Rachael began to panic. *Did they discover that I am Jewish? Do they know about the partisans? What does the child look like? Will they kill me and my baby?*

Anxiety grew rapidly as Rachael’s mind created various disturbing scenarios. Her fear of carrying the camp commandant’s child was never far from her conscious thoughts. When she looked down at the bed, she saw a string tied to the railing. The string was attached to a chain that went into the wall behind her bed. Immediately, she pulled it hard. While waiting for a nurse, Rachael tried to be calm. But she was still heavily medicated.

The drugs she had been given fogged Rachael’s mind. She tried to get out of bed, but the dizziness became worse. *I must also take my baby and get out of here!* Yet, she feared seeing the child. The commandant had blonde hair and light blue eyes. Jacob had dark hair and dark eyes. *So, the moment of truth has finally arrived.* The fear of bearing the Nazi commandant’s child was overwhelming. Caring for that child was a burden that she thought herself incapable of providing. “Dear God,” Rachael prayed. “Please give my baby dark hair and brown eyes. I beg you. Upon the soul of my father, my mother and my sister

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please let my baby be Jacob's seed, not the wicked German." Rachael realized that she was more frightened now than she had ever been. Even fighting the partisans was less stressful than waiting to discover the child's true heritage. She trembled as she again pulled the string that would bring a nurse.

After a few minutes a nurse arrived. This nurse was much older than the nurse in the delivery room. She gazed down at Rachael without a trace of a smile. Rachael's mind continued to spin out of control. She screamed at the nurse. "Where is my baby? "Where am I? What happened?" Rachael tried to get out of bed, but her arms and legs did not follow directions appropriately. The nurse reached over the bed and pushed Rachael back. The two struggled against each other for a moment.

"Have no fear, Mrs. Schmidt." She had a deep and resonating voice. "Your son is fine. Shall I bring him to you?"

Rachael's mind was still in shock and further disoriented by medication. But she had heard the nurse say, "Your *son*." With a sense of tremendous relief, Rachael fell back on her bed. "My son, you said?" Rachael's voice was hoarse. She had to repeat herself. But the nurse paused at the edge of the bed and said, "Yes, Helga," replied the nurse. "You have a son."

The nurse came back moments later, carrying a small infant. She sat on the edge of the bed and slowly transferred the tiny bundle of life into Rachael's arms. Inside the folded white cloth that now lay upon her lap, the new life was wiggling and moving. *But, what if the child has blonde hair?* The horror returned. Her heart was pounding and her hands trembled so much that she could hardly grasp the cloth to fold it back. The nurse saw this and gave Rachael a strange glance. Then, the nurse helped her fold the cloth away, exposing the infant underneath. Rachael saw a clump of thick *blonde* hair. The child opened his eyes and looked up at his mother for the first time. The eyes were light blue, not dark like Jacob's. She suddenly felt nauseous. The nurse must have seen it on her face and she took the infant back. Rachael retched as her stomach clamped down hard. But, very little came up. It had been a long time since Rachael had any food. She was covered with perspiration and her hands were trembling.

Rachael looked back at the child, hardly believing what had happened. "Am I dreaming?" Rachael asked the nurse. The nurse smiled and softly said, "No dear, you are not dreaming. You are in the hospital in Krakow and you've just delivered an eight-and-a half pound blonde-haired, blue-eyed boy." The child moved silently in the nurse's arms. Rachael began to cry. She was still dizzy and lightheaded. As she looked down at the child, she thought about her beloved Jacob. *How can I show him a child that has no resemblance to us?* As the nurse turned to leave the room, Rachael suddenly grabbed her white dress and yanked the nurse back towards her. "What is the date?"

The nurse looked back and said, "It's December 23rd, my dear. Now, just lie back down and get some rest. You'll have plenty of time to hold your son tomorrow."

But Rachael continued to pull as hard as she could on the nurse's uniform. Her mind was still whirling and she was on the verge of fainting. "No," screamed Rachael. "Not that date. What's the Heb...?"

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Suddenly, a wave of light exploded in Rachael's head. The light was so intense that it seemed her head was exploding. In a fraction of a second, Rachael realized that she was asking the nurse for the *Hebrew* date of her son's birth. Although heavily drugged, Rachael had stopped herself from finishing the question. In a flash, she remembered that she was not Rachael any more. She was "Helga Schmidt."

The nurse, who had thought Rachael's behavior strange before, now glared at her. "What was that you were asking me?" Their eyes met. Rachael knew that the nurse would see only fear in her eyes. Suddenly, she realized that she had to be brave now – not just for herself, but also for her child. Summoning all of the courage that she could muster, Rachael said, "I meant to ask, what the best name is for this child. But I've decided on Anton. His name will be Anton." Still glaring at her, the nurse seemed unmoved by her explanation.

"I see," exclaimed the condescending nurse. At any rate, it's time for you to learn how to breastfeed your son."

The hospital staff had been puzzled about why "Helga" was alone. There seemed to be no one to contact. Rachael had nothing in her possession beyond her false identity papers. The nurse that had taken care of Rachael earlier was nowhere to be seen. Another nurse found an address in Rachael's coat pocket. It simply said "*1512 Alega Street, # 202, Lublin, Poland.*"

For the next two days, Rachael tried to bond with Anton. He was a strong child. Calm in demeanor, he rarely cried. He had striking blonde hair. It was a combination of yellow and white. Unfortunately, Rachael could not help but think about the evil Strobel each time she took Anton in her arms. Just the thought of him made her recoil. She had to recover her wits and force herself to bring the baby to her breast. She missed Jacob horribly, and now there was a dark cloud upon the horizon. She had to make a decision soon about the child. She could offer it for adoption, she thought. And while that seemed like a good idea, something deep inside told her no. After all, she had carried and nourished this little person for the past nine months. She had begun to bond with him.

On the morning of her third day in the hospital, Rachael was playing with Anton in her sun-soaked room. He seemed to be growing and changing almost by the hour. She had definitely seen him smile and it melted her heart. Rachael picked up her son and playfully dangled him in the air. He looked down at her and offered a tiny smile. Suddenly, there was a loud knock upon her door. Rachael looked up to see a middle-aged Gestapo officer enter the room. He scowled at her. Her heart jumped into her throat as she realized how familiar this man seemed to be. *I have seen this man somewhere!* Then she realized where she had seen him before. It was in the Salzburg bar where she and Jacob had played games with the Gestapo officers, feigning to be from other countries and speaking foreign languages. She could not be positive, but this man looked identical. Perhaps he had gained a little weight. His disposition seemed dark.

"May I come in?" asked the Gestapo officer. Without waiting for an answer, he approached her bedside. "I am Obersturmbanfuhrer Mettler. May I ask you a few questions?" Rachael's heart was pounding very hard. She wondered if he could notice, as she pulled Anton down into her lap and placed both arms

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around him. It was a protective stance, not lost on Mettler. Rachael was trembling and it was obvious to him. He made a mental note of her fearful reaction. Of course, many people feared the Gestapo.

“What do you want,” hissed Rachael at the black-clad agent.

“I only wish to ask you some questions, Mrs. Schmidt.” He enunciated “*Mrs. Schmidt*” as though he was not certain that he believed it was her real name. Mettler realized that she feared him and it gave him strength. This made Rachael even more frightened. And though she trembled in front of the Gestapo officer, underneath, a newly found strength was beginning to emerge. She realized that her son’s life was now in danger, not just her own. Summoning this new strength, Rachael prepared herself for questioning.

Without waiting for a reply, Mettler began. “I see that you arrived here three days ago and that you were already in labor. Yes?” Rachael stared at Mettler, but said nothing. “We found the car that you were driving. It was badly crashed. What happened?”

Rachael decided to give the man as little as possible. “I skidded on the snow and ice. The car went off the road.”

Mettler continued, “We found a great deal of blood in the car. In fact, most of it was on the passenger seat. What happened?”

Rachael’s brain was in high gear as she considered several options. “As you said, Herr Mettler, I was already in labor before I arrived. Women bleed when they have a baby,” she replied in a terse voice. So far, it seemed that he did not recognize her from their encounter at the Salzburg bar. Or, was he concealing it? It was more than three years ago. Her hair was much longer then and her face was thinner now. People’s faces can change a lot in three years, she thought.

Mettler pulled a small notebook from his shiny black leather overcoat, which was long enough to touch his boots. Thumbing through several pages, he found what he was looking for. “It seems that a family named Gearhard found you, after your car had crashed on their property. They brought you in here.” Rachael was surprised. No one had told her this before. She remained quiet and looked at him. “Were you alone, Mrs. Schmidt?”

Rachael had to think quickly. She certainly could not admit that the leader of the local partisans had been with her. “Yes, I was alone, Herr Mettler.” His dark, threatening eyes were burning directly into her eyes. “Now, Mrs. Schmidt, why would a woman nine months pregnant be traveling unaccompanied, particularly over such a long distance and through such bad weather?” Rachael feared that he could look right through her. Her heart was now pounding so hard that she could see her hospital gown shaking slightly with each beat. Perspiration broke out on her head and neck. Her hands trembled underneath the sheets. Little Anton was apparently asleep under his cloth.

Rachael decided to be strong and act defensive. “Herr Mettler, I am a widow. My husband died serving the Fatherland on the Eastern Front. I traveled alone because I had no one to go with me.” Rachael needed to get out of this interrogation before Mettler could see her sweating. In an instant, she came up with a plan. Without moving her arms, she pinched Anton, underneath the covers. Instantly, he began to cry. Pulling him up to her chest, she looked up at

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Mettler. "As you see, Herr Obersturmbanfuhrer, I must attend to my child's needs.

Just then, the nurse arrived at the doorway. She gave Mettler an unsettled look, as if she was gravely concerned about Rachael. But why was she concerned? Did they suspect that she was a Jew or a partisan? Rachael chided herself again for asking the Hebrew date of her child's birth. *How could I be so stupid?* But, did she actually say the word "Hebrew?" She could not remember. Still, Rachael sensed that something was very wrong. *Why is the nurse here just now? Is she cooperating with Mettler?* The nurse looked back and forth between Mettler and Rachael. She frowned. Then Rachael saw that she was holding something in her left hand. As she entered the room, Rachael saw that the nurse was holding a hypodermic needle. When the nurse reached her bedside, she saw that the needle was empty. *What are these two planning?*

Mettler looked down at Rachael with a wry smile. "I would like a sample of your blood, Mrs. Schmidt." Rachael began to panic. Mettler would discover that the blood in the car did not come from her, unless she had the same type as Chrusciel. Her perspiration was now falling down from her brow, across her face and onto the blanket. She wiped it off quickly, but Mettler observed every movement. "You seem somewhat nervous, Mrs. Schmidt. Are you nervous about something? Is there something you want to tell me about who you really are and how you arrived here?" Mettler had now pounced upon Rachael, applying as much pressure as possible.

With eyes wide open and frightened, Rachael looked up at Mettler. He anticipated a full confession. Instead, she said, "Herr Mettler, I do not like needles. In fact, I am deathly afraid of them. Silently, she tried to recall if any of the nurses had given her a shot.

Mettler would not be put off. He continued, "Mrs. Schmidt, I regret to inform you that a blood sample is necessary." We must be certain that your blood type matches that which we found in the abandoned car. With this, he gave a stern look at the nurse.

The nurse approached Rachael's bed slowly. She glanced back at Mettler, as though she was taking direction from him. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she asked Rachael to provide her left arm. The nurse deftly applied a tourniquet to it, in order to enlarge the vein inside her elbow. Rachael noticed that the nurse's hands were trembling. She wanted to be there no more than Rachael wanted to have her blood taken. Rachael's head was swimming. *They will soon know that Anton's blood is in the car, not mine!* Desperately seeking some way out of this horror, she was at a loss for ideas. *Mettler has me trapped!* She thought she might try to break the glass syringe, but the nurse would simply obtain another. Rachael's mind was screaming for help. *God, please help me. Please don't let these horrible people take my son.*

The nurse was satisfied with the size of Rachael's vein and placed the needle just above it. After pushing the syringe all the way to the bottom, she pushed the needle into Rachael's skin. A small red puddle appeared at the bottom of the syringe. Rachael's heart sank as she realized that she had lost. She would soon be a prisoner again. *And the Gestapo will take my son.*

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Suddenly, an older man and woman burst through the doorway. The frumpy, middle-aged woman ran to Rachael's bedside and put her chubby arms around Rachael's neck. "Helga! Helga! Oh my God. We thought we would never find you. Oh dearest Helga. Praise Jesus that we found you! Yes, thank the Lord. We found you at last! We have been looking everywhere! Isn't that right, Stefan?"

Behind this strange woman was a squat, bald, middle-aged man, grasping his hat and staring back with a wry smile. "Yes, Freda. We have been to every hospital in southern Poland looking for you Helga." The woman began fussing over Rachael and the baby – all the time ignoring the nonplussed Gestapo officer. Rachael could only stare at these babbling people with an open mouth.

Freda, recognizing this as a danger exclaimed, "You don't recognize your old Aunt Freda and Uncle Stefan? Oh, well, it's been so many years since you have seen us. It's certainly understandable. After all, everyone gets older. Age defeats us all, isn't that right Stefan? And who do we have here?" Freda gently picked up little Anton, cooing and babbling to him.

It was as though a human tidal wave had swamped everyone in the room. In a matter of seconds, Freda had managed to mesmerize the nurse and Mettler. They stared at her as they might some huge storm on its way towards them, deafening and tumultuous. It was like suddenly skipping a dozen pages in a book. The characters were no longer where they should be and the action is in a different direction. The dialog from before was gone.

Suddenly saved, Rachael was able to speak again. "Oh, yes of course, Aunt Freda." Rachael was stumbling and hesitating. She had never been a great actress. "This is my son Anton, Aunt Freda."

Freda held the child up and began to cuddle him in her arms. "Look Stefan. He is your newest great-nephew. Don't you think he looks just like our little Helga?" She handed the child to "Stefan," who seemed not to know what to do with his hat. Throwing his hat on the bed, he stood in the center of the room holding little Anton straight out in his arms, as though he was made of wood. The nurse stared at him, blinking.

Freda had now taken complete control of the room. Walking over to Mettler, she glared at him as though he was a spider. "And who is this?" Mettler opened his mouth to speak. But Freda interrupted him before he could say a word. "Well, we certainly do not need any soldiers in this room. What we need here is peace and quiet. Don't you see that our dear little Helga has gone through a terrible time? My goodness, some people just have no common courtesy anymore. Whatever it is that you want or need, it can be taken care of later. Now, off with you, before you make someone sick here."

Freda began to herd Mettler out of the room while she spoke. He made a vain attempt to stop her. "Madam, I am Oberstormban..."

But, just as quickly, she cut him off. "Well, Herr Stormban, or whatever your name is, you can come back later, when poor Helga has had some much needed rest. This woman has just delivered a baby! Come back later." With that remark, she literally pushed Mettler out of the room and began to close the door. She suddenly realized that the nurse was still in the room. Glaring at the wide-eyed nurse, Freda walked towards her. Without saying a word, the frightened

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nurse grabbed her syringe and literally ran from the room.

When Freda shut the door behind the nurse, she heaved a tremendous sigh of relief. She walked back to Rachael's bed. In a quiet and soft voice, she whispered to Rachael. "My name is Freda. This is Sol, my husband. Until we were recently evicted by the Nazis, we lived in Lublin, a town about fifty miles from here. Anton Chrusciel contacted us about you. He said that he would be bringing you to us. With the terrible storm, we wondered if you were safe. My God, dear, what has happened to you?"

Freda and Sol took Rachael and Anton out of the hospital ten minutes later. Mettler would have to find them. They paid in cash for the hospital bill. When the head nurse demanded an address where they could be reached, she said that they were planning to leave the country and would send them a forwarding address as soon as possible.

In the car, on the way to Lublin, Freda told Rachael that their names were not really Freda and Stefan Levinowski. In reality, they were Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Levin. They had lived their entire lives in a small Jewish village called Riga, until German troops came one night and slaughtered most of the village. Freda and Sol managed to escape, but had no place to go. They wandered the countryside until local partisans found them. The leader of the partisans was none other than Anton Chrusciel. His aunt and uncle had just moved out of a small farmhouse near Krakow. He told Freda and Sol to change their names, pretend to be Christians and to move into the house vacated by his aunt and uncle. They told neighbors that they had purchased the house from the previous owners. In reality, they were allowed to live there until the war was over.

Freda turned around in the car so that she could see Rachael's face. "What happened to Anton? He was supposed to stay with you!" Rachael told them how Anton had been shot and how she was forced to dump him on the porch of a farmhouse. "I don't know if he survived or not," said Rachael. "I hope to God that they saved him."

After a long silence, Sol turned his head slightly and glanced at Rachael in the back seat. "So, what's your story? Sol asked."

Freda shouted at him. "Sol, please give Rachael time. I'm sure that she will tell us what happened to her when she's ready. Besides," she admonished him, "Anton spoke so wonderfully about Mrs. Silverman. We must show her more respect than that." Sol remained quiet.

Rachael smiled briefly at Freda, and then paused for a moment before speaking. "No. It's all right. I really don't mind talking about it. Sometimes, I think it helps."

Rachael thought about how her life had changed in the past three years. In many ways, her life before the Nazi tyranny seemed like a different life, or at least a lifetime ago. She still had trouble believing it actually happened. She thought about how she and Jacob would flaunt their hidden identities in front of Gestapo officers, as though the worst thing that could happen to them if caught was a stern lecture. Yes, it now seemed like a totally different existence.

"My husband and I are Salzburg Jews. My mother died shortly after my sister was born. I lived with my father and my sister, Anna. At the end of 1939,

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we were forced to leave our homes and move into a ghetto. About a year later, we were forced to move again. That time we were sent to a camp near Prague. They called it Theresienstadt. We were there for two years.” Rachael paused for a moment as she recalled the horror of being raped by the commandant. “During that time, I married my husband. We stood under a *chuppah* and said the blessings.” Rachael sighed deeply as she thought about her wedding night. She wondered if she would ever be able to talk about being raped in the camp. *I suppose that one day, I will have to. After all, I am a dark-haired, dark-skinned woman caring for a blond-haired, light-skinned child!* Then, for one wonderful moment, she remembered how close she was with Moshe. *Yes, if I could talk to anyone about it, it would be Moshe.*

Rachael continued. “My husband and I escaped from the camp through a tunnel. Then, we joined the partisans, where we met Anton. Unfortunately, the Germans captured my husband when a traitor turned us in.” Rachael felt the anger rise with her mind, until it was a crescendo of hate. “That was last summer... I don’t know where he is now.” Rachael fought back tears. “I don’t know if my husband is still alive or if his father is still alive. I haven’t seen or heard from my father, since he was forced to leave Theresienstadt. Anton said that they were planning to transfer most of the Jews from Theresienstadt to a camp in Poland. Is there a camp nearby?” Have you heard anything about Anton? Was there something in the newspaper about a man badly injured?” Rachael’s voice trailed off as tears now rolled down her cheeks. Freda gave her a handkerchief.

“We’ve heard nothing about a man being shot or left on someone’s porch. Sol, have you read anything in the papers about Anton?” Sol slowly shook his head.

Freda now turned herself completely around so that she could look at Rachael. “My dear, there are many German camps in Poland. We spoke with some Jews only two months ago who had been inside two such camps. They escaped from a work detail in nearby factories. Do you want me to tell you what happens in the camps? I ask you now to think about what I have just said, because the news of what happens in those camps is beyond terrifying. If you prefer not to know, just say so – and I will stop now.”

Rachael felt as though she had been punched in the stomach. Her heart pounded heavily in her chest. She wanted to say no. Rachael thought that she had been through the worst that life could mete out. She assumed that losing her father, sister, house, possessions, food, and all of the comforts that people expect was the worst that life had to offer. She assumed that the forced relocation of her family without medical care was beyond comprehension. She thought that being raped by a disgusting Nazi was beyond comprehension. *What could be worse?* “Tell me everything,” said Rachael.

Freda opened her mouth to speak, and then paused. After a moment, she began again. “We have no idea how many camps the Germans have built here in Poland. Perhaps there are dozens. The people we spoke with told us about three camps. They are called Treblinka, Sobibor and a place that we call Oswiecim. The Germans call it *Auschwitz*.” Freda paused for a moment. She was careful in selecting her words.

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Rachael sensed this and said, "Please don't mince words with me Freda. Tell me everything. I'm ready."

Freda continued. "My dear, many prisoners are forced to work in nearby factories. The Germans call them labor camps. But, there is much, much more going on in those camps. Rachael, they are also *death camps*." Those two words impacted Rachael as though someone had ripped her heart out. *NO! They will not take my Jacob!* Freda continued, in a monotone voice. "According to three of the people who lived at Auschwitz, it is a killing factory. Trains pull into the camp at all hours of the day and night. The trains are filled with prisoners from all over Europe. Some of them are gentiles who the Germans hate, like Gypsies, homosexuals or communists. Some of them are political prisoners or captured prisoners of war. But, my dear, the majority of the prisoners are Jews. Once they have been removed from the trains, the Germans tell them that they must go into a building for baths and inhalation therapy. Always, there are guards with machine guns pointing at them, so there is no chance for escape. The people are marched into the building, forced to take off their clothes, have their heads shaved and then, they..." Freda's voice trailed off and then stopped. Rachael saw that Freda needed to collect herself before she could continue.

Rachael patiently waited. Finally, after wiping tears from her eyes, Freda was ready to speak again. "The people are forced to go into a large shower room. Over the doorway, a sign says "Bath and Inhalation." The room has plumbing and showerheads hanging from the ceiling. So, they go in. Everyone has heard stories about Germans gassing people to death. So, they are all afraid. They pray that water will come down from the ceiling. But German soldiers from the roof drop canisters of poison gas. In minutes, everyone is dead. Then..." Freda finally broke down in tears and was unable to continue.

Surprisingly, Sol continued. "So, they kill the Jews with some sort of poison gas, and then they burn the bodies." Rachael was nauseous. *How can one say such things without going mad? "So they kill the Jews with some sort of poison gas, and then burn the bodies." What madness! To say it is terrible, let alone to do it! Oh dear, sweet God, please protect Jacob and Moshe. Please do not let them die amid such horror.*

Rachael began to feel light-headed. She could hardly believe what she was hearing. Yes, she had heard stories about Germans gassing Jews. But they were only stories. Now, listening to this version from people who had been there, she was unable to diminish the horror from its new perspective in reality. *What if Jacob and Moshe are in one of those camps?* She began to feel faint. Rachael tried to speak, but her voice was hoarse. "I need to know," she croaked.

Sol continued his forensic description of the horror of the camps. He spoke slowly and carefully, in a deep, resonating voice. "The Germans use strong Jewish men for forced labor in factories and in the camps. After the Germans have killed everyone in the gas room, Jewish workers take the bodies out and move them to another part of the building. It's a crematorium. There, they are forced to burn the bodies. And when there are too many bodies to burn, they bury them. If the crematoria are broken, they burn the bodies in huge pits, near the camps. Sometimes, they shoot the prisoners. Some of Germany's largest and most promi-

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ment companies now use Jews as free forced labor. They live in barracks inside the camp, but travel outside the camp to work each day. Other Jews are allowed to live so that they may guard the Jews living in the camp. These Jews are called 'kapos.' There are women and men kapos who live with and supervise each barracks. Mostly, the other Jews hate them for conspiring with the Nazis. Some of the men who are kapos are responsible for the really dreadful work. They move the bodies from the gas rooms to the crematoriums. They kill each of those work details every month or two." After a brief pause, he added, "I suppose it would be pretty difficult to live with yourself after doing such things."

Rachael could hardly believe what she was hearing. Jacob had confided in her about everything, including his vivid nightmare about being forced to burn the dead bodies of Jews. Her heart was now pounding so hard and so fast that her entire chest was in great discomfort. "My husband had a dream about burning dead Jews in a huge oven," she said.

Freda, who had by now regained her composure, chimed in. "I'm sure that many people have had such dreams recently, my dear."

"Yes," replied Rachael. "But he dreamt this in 1939, before we were deported and before anyone was talking about such things." Suddenly, Sol applied the brakes and the car screeched to a halt in the middle of the deserted country road. The windshield wipers traced back and forth as the three of them stared at each other in silence.

Finally, Freda spoke. "Rachael, if what you are saying is true, then you must pray that your husband is strong and that he is working in a factory near the camps. What does your father-in-law do? Is he strong?" Rachael thought about it for a moment. Moshe was never what you would call "strong." He was slight of build.

"He is a doctor," she replied. Upon hearing this, Freda and Sol looked at each other for a long moment, saying nothing. *They are hiding something from me!* To Rachael their silence was a deafening, fearful scream. "Why are you quiet?" she asked. "What's wrong with being a doctor?"

Freda spoke, hesitatingly. "What kind of doctor is he?" Rachael replied, "He's a surgeon." Again, Freda and Sol stared at each other without speaking. Rachael was getting angry. "What's wrong with being a surgeon?"

Freda fumbled in her purse for a moment, looking for another handkerchief. After a few moments of fumbling, Sol reached into his pocket and gave Freda his clean, white handkerchief.

"Well, my dear," Freda said while blowing her nose, "we've heard that the Germans are keen on experimenting upon the prisoners. We were told that they force Jewish doctors to help them perform medical experiments. Sometimes, we've heard, they operate without any anesthesia."

"Stop frightening the poor child," Sol said. "That is probably just a wild rumor." Rachael understood that Sol was only trying to protect her.

Rachael gasped. "Nobody could be that cruel," she stammered. It's not possible, she thought. "Someone just made that up," she said. Freda opened her mouth to say something and then stopped. Rachael noticed this and started to ask why. But deep inside, she could take no more information. She was already

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feeling nauseous. What if the Nazis tried to make dear Moshe perform medical experiments? Her heart was still pounding in her chest and she felt like throwing up. Fortunately, at that moment they arrived home. She was surprised to see Christmas decorations on the front of the house. She looked for a *mezuzah* on the doorpost. Of course, there was none. Freda and Sol had become “good Christians” for all to see.

Freda and Sol lived in a three-story frame farmhouse. It was very old, but seemed to be in good condition. More importantly, the neighbors were few and distant. These days, everyone was suspicious of their neighbors. They could be spies, if they were not escaped prisoners or, worse yet, escaped Jews or Gypsies. Freda and Sol lived in daily fear of being caught. They stayed inside the house unless they absolutely had to go out. They shopped at odd hours, to minimize scrutiny. They spoke to no one, unless spoken to. They wore drab nondescript clothing, so as not to be remembered. In public, they initiated no conversations and were politely distant.

And each Sunday, Freda and Sol forced themselves to attend services at a nearby Catholic church. They learned how to mimic participation in the service. They even learned how to take communion. They smiled but spoke as little as possible, wiping every Yiddish expression from their vocabulary. On Saturdays, they had their own private Sabbath service, in the basement of the house – with the windows sealed. They carefully hid every item that represented Judaism. Above all, Sol was very careful not to allow anyone to see him naked.

The weeks passed and springtime approached as Rachael cared for little Anton in the old farmhouse near Krakow. Freda introduced Rachael to everyone as her niece “Helga.” They told their neighbors that her husband was killed while in the Polish army. After losing her dear husband to the war, poor Helga was forced to deliver her child and take care of him by herself. Freda therefore was kind enough to bring Helga and her newborn son into their home.

Freda and Sol found it easier than they anticipated assimilating into the Christian community in Krakow. Although they seemed to be substantially more quiet and more reserved than most of their neighbors, the Levin’s often acted the part quite well. They were able to decorate the house for Christmas with reasonable success. Of course, they had no idea how to buy a tree, what to place upon it, or how to decorate the house. So, they imitated their Christian neighbors.

Freda and Sol began to attend Church services in the nearest town almost as soon as they arrived. Like decorating their house, they had to learn how to behave in church by copying everyone else. It was very frightening at first. They were sometimes asked in church why they were not singing. They told others that the songs were sung to a different tune where they came from. It was very frightening when they returned home and wondered what people in the church community might be saying about them.

On a sunny spring day there was a knock upon the door. Freda was cooking and Sol was outside, collecting firewood. Rachael rushed to the door. She had begun to find it interesting having conversations with her new neighbors. With a broad smile and somewhat of a flourish, Rachael opened the door, and saw – Anton Chrusciel! Staring at the apparition in the doorway Rachael’s knees

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suddenly wobbled, causing her to sway. Then, her eyes rolled up into her head and she fainted. Chrusciel caught her just before she hit the floor.

Rachael awoke several minutes later. She was lying upon the sofa in the living room. Chrusciel was on his knees next to the couch, applying a cold compress to her forehead. He was thin, pale and weak, but shockingly alive. Rachael blinked her eyes twice and pulled her head back, as though the vision before her might simply vanish. He then he smiled at her and Rachael knew that it really was Anton and he was very much – *alive*. She wrapped her arms around him. In squeezing him tightly, Rachael heard Anton gasp with pain. *His wounds must still be dreadful!* “Oh, my God. Anton, it’s really you! You are alive!” Then the tears came and Rachael could not stop crying.

Chrusciel put his hands around Rachael’s face and grinned. “Thought you could get rid of me by just dumping my dead body upon some poor old Polish farmer’s doorstep, did you?” Rachael felt ashamed. Her face turned red with embarrassment. “No, no... please don’t take it the wrong way,” he insisted. “You did the right thing, Rachael. I’m a known partisan. You are not. I was just having some fun with you! Of course, you were right. They would have taken you and your child away. You must think about the baby now.” They both smiled broadly and hugged each other again, this time somewhat more gently on Rachael’s part.

Chrusciel told Rachael about being found by the farmer’s daughter, lying in a pool of blood on the front porch, barely alive. “The daughter and her mother told the father that they must rush me to the hospital. The father told them that I was most likely a Gypsy or a Jew. I was barely conscious. But I heard the farmer say, ‘Best thing here is a bullet in the head. Put him out of his misery right quick,’ he added. The daughter, who Chrusciel guessed was around eighteen, argued vociferously with her father. ‘No, Papa, we must save his life,’” added Chrusciel.

Rachael smiled in delight when Chrusciel altered his voice for the farmer’s daughter’s part. “I remember looking up at the farmer. He was an older man, with a much wrinkled face. Each time he looked at me, it was as though I crawled out from underneath some rock. I could tell that he wanted to kill me.”

Chrusciel told of how adamant the mother and daughter were about saving his life. They argued for a long time. “Absolutely not,” the father insisted. “He’s been shot, don’t you see! He’s a criminal, or a Jew!” Chrusciel said that he was awake and alert throughout this pivotal argument that would save or end his life. Unfortunately, he was too weak to do or say anything to defend himself. “I was completely at their mercy,” he said. “I was fading in and out of consciousness.”

Chrusciel continued in a soft, measured voice. “Rachael, when I was lying there, upon this farmer’s front porch, I was so cold. I was colder than I have ever been in my life. Not only was I unable to move or speak, my vision was fading. I could see brightness in front, but only darkness to the sides. With the realization that I was about to die, I began to pray. I managed to whisper ‘*our father, who art in Heaven.*’ That did the trick. Upon hearing Christian prayers, the farmer picked me up and threw me into the back seat of his truck. After that, I had no memory at all until I woke up in the hospital after surgery. I was in the very same hospital in Krakow as you were. The hospital records no doubt re-

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corded my admission on the same day. Of course, no one in the hospital had a clue that we had been traveling companions, much less had battled German troops together at a checkpoint. During the next two days, I was too weak to do anything. On the third day, I left the hospital without permission. Of course, I gave them no forwarding address. But I'm certain that the Gestapo is now searching for me. For that reason, I cannot stay here."

Rachael held his face in her hands. "Oh Anton, I'm so happy to see you. I prayed and prayed that you somehow would be alive." Many emotions were winding their way through her mind. She paused for a moment, attempting to clear her head. Then she continued in a whisper, so that Freda and Sol could not hear. "Take me with you Anton. "I must find Jacob." Chrusciel saw the sincerity in Rachael's eyes.

"But Rachael," he said softly, "You have a child to care for."

Rachael would not be swayed. "Freda and Sol will care for little Anton. He'll be safe here, until I find Jacob."

Chrusciel shook his head from side to side and frowned. "Rachael, dear Rachael. I don't want to have to say this, but I must. Jacob and his parents are in a death camp. They might not... even be alive." Chrusciel was surprised at how that thought bothered him. He too had become emotionally attached to Jacob. How odd, he thought, that I so much admire the husband of the woman that I love.

"Rachael," said Chrusciel with a raspy voice, "I am here with a message." Rachael could not imagine what sort of message he had for her. But his expression suddenly hardened. "We have known about you and your child living here with the Levins. We traced you here from the hospital. We only know about three or four Jews living as Christians in this part of Poland. It wasn't difficult. Our message is for you, Rachael. We want you to come back." Rachael's expression must have registered an emotion. She saw Chrusciel's expression change. "Yes, Rachael, we want you with the partisans. But you must know that your baby is not as safe as you believe, here with Freda and Sol. You believe that he will be safe here. But the Gestapo is not stupid. If just one of the neighbors around here suspects Freda and Sol, they will most certainly be arrested. If that happens, they and little Anton will go to the same place that Jacob is now."

This was exactly what Rachael was waiting for – a chance to get back into the action. She so desperately needed to find Jacob, Moshe and Hanna. She believed that little Anton would be safe with the Levins. Now that her health had returned, Rachael was ready to fight the Nazis again. "You will take me back?"

Grinning from ear to ear, Chrusciel said, "Of course we will take you back. You are our toughest fighter!" They laughed and laughed.

Then, their eyes met. Chrusciel spoke very softly. "You named the child after me?"

Still gazing into Chrusciel's eyes, Rachael whispered, "Anton, I thought that you were dead. But you saved my life. It was the least that I could do." He tightened his grip on her hands. "I thought you were gone Anton. I thought that you were dead. There was nothing else that I could do for you. I had to think about my child." She began to cry. Through her blurred vision, she saw that

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Chrusciel was also crying. He quickly wiped the tears away with his hands. But Rachael had seen the tears of joy. In this one way, his name would remain with Rachael – even if he could not.

Chrusciel stayed the night. As he was leaving the next morning, Rachael appeared at the doorway. She beamed at him, “Going somewhere without saying good-bye?” Rachael’s flare for the dramatic enhanced the impact of her question. Chrusciel stared at Rachael for a moment. He seemed to be trying to find an appropriate response.

Finally, he spoke. “Rachael, I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but Jacob and his parents have been moved to a place which is impenetrable. The SS took them away on a train, about two weeks ago.”

“Oh my God,” cried Rachael. She fell into the sofa with her hands covering her face and began to weep. Her mind was filled with panic. Her heart began to race. “Oh, my dear Jacob is going to the worst possible place! What am I going to do?” Rachael had never felt so afraid.

Freda and Sol took Rachael’s hand and asked her to sit with them for a moment. Sol, who had heard the entire conversation, glanced at Freda and spoke. “Rachael, you are safe here. Nobody here suspects us. We even go to church every Sunday. Please stay on with us.” He gazed into Rachael’s eyes with his own bright brown eyes. Rachael looked back at Chrusciel, then back again at Sol and Freda.

Freda spoke next. Her typically loud and vociferous voice was soft and somewhat sad. “Rachael, although we’ve only known you for a few short weeks, we have come to love you as a daughter. We love little Anton as if he were our own grandchild. Please stay with us. Allow us to care for you and your child. We are safe here, you know.” But Rachael noticed that Freda gave Sol a brief look of concern. She read fear in their brief exchange. “Well,” she continued in a lower voice, “we’re as safe as any other Jew hiding from the Nazis.” This was followed by an uncomfortable silence.

Rachael’s mind was spiraling. She looked at Chrusciel for advice. He simply looked back. It would have to be her decision. Finally, she spoke in a stern, measured voice. “Sol, you and Freda saved my life and sheltered me in my greatest time of need. You have taken in and loved my baby, as though he were your own grandchild. You are like second parents to me. I will never forget your kindness and generosity. But I must find Jacob. He would do the same for me. Will you please look after little Anton until I return? I know that I’m asking a great deal from you. We are not even related.” What a moral dilemma, she thought. After a moment of silence, she looked at Chrusciel and said defiantly, “I must find my husband. I will go with you as a fighter. I am still a partisan and I can still fight.” In a soft but firm voice, she continued. “But most of all, I must find my husband.”

She waited through a long moment of awkward silence. Rachael then turned to look at Freda. In almost a whisper, she said, “I believe that you are safe here. And I humbly ask permission to leave my son, Anton, in your care.” Freda put her arms around Rachael. Tears ran down their cheeks. Sol noticed that one of Freda’s tears caught and reflected light from a nearby table lamp. It glittered like

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a bright star for a moment, before falling into the cloth of the sofa. This is a time only for tears, he thought.

Freda spoke first. "Of course you can leave Anton with us. We'll take very good care of him." Sol spoke next. "Yes, yes... go and fight for your husband." He choked off the ending, as he could not continue without crying. Freda put her hands around Rachael's face and then softly said, "You must believe that no harm will come to him. We will all be safe here." As she turned to walk away, Rachael's eyes met with Chrusciel's gaze of consternation. He then shook his head in disbelief and turned to walk away. Suddenly, Rachael grasped Chrusciel's arm tightly. "Anton, I do feel safe here. Don't you believe that?"

Their eyes met again. "Rachael," Chrusciel paused with emotion, "Freda and Sol are still new here." There was a long pause, before he continued. "We must hope that they will never arouse suspicion. Rachael, they have false identity papers. You know that. You must realize that the vast majority of these Jews living as Christians will eventually be caught. It's a big risk, Rachael."

But Rachael was too enamored with returning to the partisans and fighting for her beloved Jacob. Nothing could keep her away from that fight – not even her new son, a child that she sometimes had trouble loving. Sometimes when she gazed into the baby's blue eyes, she saw the man who had brutally raped and beat her at Theresienstadt. She tried so hard to look past those frightening blue eyes and into the soul of this tiny person that she had nourished for the past nine months. She gave baby Anton everything that he needed – food, shelter, bathing, cuddling. She sang to him when he cried. She held him until he was asleep. But the questions that entered her mind were often horrible. *Will this child mature into the evil villain that his father was? Will he prefer to love, or to hate?* Rachael told herself that these questions were absurd. She wanted to believe that a child's behavior is more a reflection of the parent's conditioning than the child's heredity. *But those blue eyes!* Every time Anton opened his little sky-blue eyes Rachael felt faint. She had come to realize that she was afraid of this tiny person. And all of the logic that she applied was still no match for this constant source of anxiety. Worse yet, how would her dear Jacob react upon seeing the child's blonde hair and blue eyes? *Will he hate me?* That was the most frightening thought that Rachael had ever encountered. She would rather be dead than be without Jacob.

Chrusciel, who knew nothing about Rachael's rape, sensed the problem the first time that he saw the child. Anyone with the opportunity to see both Jacob and Rachael would observe that the child resembled someone entirely different.

Chrusciel wisely said nothing and acted as though no problem existed. Upon his arrival, he held the baby for almost an hour, snuggling with his tiny namesake. "I'm so grateful to you," Anton said softly to Rachael. "You did everything in your power to save me and then you named your first child after me. I am more than humbled." Chrusciel spoke this while gazing directly into Rachael's eyes. She knew that Chrusciel still loved her. He loved her in a very mature way and he would do anything for her – and now also for her child. However, Chrusciel understood that more than anything else – he wanted Rachael to be truly happy. He would accept this even if meant that she would spend the rest of her life with Jacob.

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After a long pause in the doorway, Chrusciel tossed his head to the side and said, "All right, let's get going. We have some Nazis to kill!" He saw the genuine happiness in Rachael's eyes. "I'll be outside in the car," he said.

Before walking out, Chrusciel stopped to embrace Freda and Sol. He suddenly turned and glared at them. In a very stern voice, he said, "I know that you will take care of my little Anton here, won't you?" For a moment, both Freda and Sol looked frightened. Suddenly, Chrusciel broke into a huge smile. "You take me too seriously." They all laughed for a moment.

Then Freda said, "We will take of little Anton. Of that, you can be certain. Now, you take care of our Rachael!"

Rachael walked over to little Anton's crib. He was sound asleep, lying on his stomach. She put his tiny head in her hands. He murmured softly in his sleep. For a few moments, Rachael fussed over her new son. But she did not want to wake him. She desperately did not want to see those bright blue eyes right now. She wanted to say good-bye with him asleep. It seemed easier that way. She thought about Jacob, wondering how he would react to seeing a son with blonde hair and blue eyes. *Will he hate me forever? Will Jacob despise little Anton, knowing that he was not the child's father?* Rachael began to cry again. She wondered how many times she had cried in the past few weeks. "It's funny," she said to her sleeping son, "how I never used to cry. I never cried out loud before the Nazis came. Now, I cry all the time." Her tears flowed down her cheeks and dropped into the child's crib. She bent over and kissed the back of little Anton's head. She whispered, "I love you, Anton." Her heart ached as she wondered if she had made the right decision. *Will little Anton hate me later in life because I abandoned him at this time? Am I doing the right thing?*

Abruptly, she pulled herself upright, wiped the tears from her face and walked to the doorway. She turned back again at the doorway. "Good-bye little Anton. Be an angel for Aunt Freda and Uncle Sol." Rachael was filled with anxiety. She was responsible for this new life and she was now leaving him behind. "I'll come back for you. I promise."

Chapter 43

Surviving Auschwitz

In his tiny bunk, straddled by two men on his left and three more men on his right, Jacob wondered how far down the Nazis could beat him before he died. His bunk was on the top level in a barracks that had three levels of bunk beds. Rather than placing one or two men in the proper up and down location, the Nazis required six men to turn sideways upon the bunk. In this configuration, they could place many more men in a barracks meant for less. But the prisoners had only the center of their bodies upon a thin, straw-filled mattress. Somehow, the prisoners managed. But they were almost never able to stretch their legs out completely. He stared up at the angled ceiling. A winter storm howled against the barracks. The wind created a mournful sound as it raced over the rafters. As he gazed at the nails upon the inside of the roof, Jacob felt increasingly claustrophobic. *I am still alive. But how many more nails can they drive into me before I will be dead?*

Jacob wondered what Rachael and the baby were doing at that precise moment. Were they at a restaurant, enjoying a dinner show? Could they have passed themselves off as Christians and be living a normal life? *Does Rachael have a new name? What did she name the baby?* His emotions wandered from sadness to resentment and anger and then back to sadness. *My parents should be spoiling their new grandchild right now. Instead, my mother is dead and my father a prisoner. I should be in my last year of medical school, and possibly a violin player in the city's symphony orchestra.* Instead, Jacob was being killed gradually in this hellish death camp. It was beyond reason and sanity. *How can men do this to other humans? Farm animals receive better care!* Tears rolled down his face. Jacob was not prone to feeling sorry for himself. However, this night was an exception.

"What's your name?" asked the man next to him. This man was a new prisoner. He arrived with a large transport two days ago. His hand was already out for Jacob to shake.

"I'm Jacob Silverman, from Salzburg." The man shook Jacob's hand tightly.

"I'm Simcha Baruch," the man said with a grin. "From Graz," he added. "I've never been up to Salzburg. What's it like there? What did you do?"

Jacob was not in a mood for talking with strangers. But this man seemed to be genuinely friendly. Jacob looked at him again, but for the first time with detail. Simcha appeared to be about fifty years old. He was very thin, almost emaciated. He had gray and brown stubble on top of his head, which had been shaved within the past week or two. His beard was more white than gray. His thin lips drew upwards at the corners, as though he had a permanent smile. He looked like a nice man.

Jacob smiled briefly and began speaking softly. "I've never been to Graz,

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although one of my classmates was there. Salzburg is incredibly beautiful. It's a city nestled inside a wall of towering white and gray mountains. And all of the way around the city, going up into the mountains, is a deep, dense forest. All manner of animals live in the forest and it is not at all unusual to hear a wolf howling at night. But inside, we are as modern as any other European city. Tourism drives our economy. Salzburg is a delightful vacation spot. People come there for skiing, hiking, camping, boating, hunting, and, of course, to see where Mozart was born. We have many fine hotels and restaurants." He paused as he realized how deeply he missed home.

Simcha continued to smile, so Jacob prattled on. "I was to enter university two years ago. Or is it three years ago? I was planning to go into medicine, like my father. But, in Theresienstadt, I learned to play violin better than I thought possible. You have no idea how much musical talent there was in that camp. There were first and second part musicians for several instruments from the Berlin Philharmonic, the Munich Symphony, and the Prague Symphony. I tell you, the Jewish musicians and composers imprisoned with me were some of the best and most recognized in the world!" Jacob could hardly control his excitement as he recalled how he was among so many famous and skilled musicians and conductors. "I was very lucky to learn from them."

Simcha broke into laughter. "You sound like the mayor, or the propaganda minister!" They both laughed. Some of the men nearby who had been listening also laughed. "And," Simcha continued with a grin, "if you were really lucky, you would not have met those musicians at all!" That comment produced more laughter. Then, when the laughter had ended, Simcha's smile disappeared. "What about your family? Where are they?"

Jacob's smile also disappeared. "I have a wife, Rachael. We were married in Theresienstadt. We escaped and joined the partisans, but I was recaptured. My parents came here with me. But my mother..." Jacob was unable to complete the sentence. The thought that his mother was dead was still too new, too shocking. It was like opening a fresh wound. Each time that Jacob remembered that his mother was dead, was like a physical punch in the stomach. *Oh, God it hurts so much to think about!* He gained control and tried to finish. "When we arrived here, my mother was taken right away for what the Nazis call "special treatment. My father is a physician in the infirmary here. That is, if he is still alive." He quickly wiped away fresh tears.

Simcha put his arm around Jacob's shoulders. With a hint of a smile, he said, "I'm sorry Jacob. It's a terrible loss. We all have experienced so much death lately. It is hard to understand if the world understands what the Germans are doing to us. But here, in Auschwitz, it seems to me that you have only one occupation. You must learn how to live from one day to the next. We have no time for music here, Jacob. In Auschwitz, there is only death and waiting for your time to die. The struggle to stay alive is now our work. Allow me to educate you, my young friend from Salzburg."

Simcha paused for a moment, rolled to his side and looked up at the roof of the barracks. He seemed intensely lost in thought. Jacob wondered how a new arrival could be so wise. It seemed that he had just made a new friend. Simcha

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continued, looking directly at Jacob. "Listen to me, Jacob," he said. "If you want to continue to live, you must become valuable to the Nazis. To do that, first, you must be healthy."

Jacob thought about the dozens of bodies that appeared outside of the barracks every morning. He thought about the stacks of bodies he had seen behind the infirmary. "Each and every day here, you will see bodies lined up outside the barracks," said Jacob. "The old, sick or frail die rapidly here."

Suddenly, Simcha interrupted, "There were bodies outside of the barracks everywhere that I have been. In the ghetto in Austria and in Theresienstadt, we always saw bodies outside our buildings." Simcha paused for a moment before continuing. His eyes were distant and moist, as though he were looking at all of those bodies again. "Jacob, this is not my first or second or third camp. This is my fifth camp. The Nazis have worked me and starved me and moved me many times."

Suddenly, everyone nearby sat up and stared with astonishment at Simcha. Jacob asked, "Please tell me where you have been."

Simcha sighed and closed his eyes. "Jacob, it was not my intention to discuss the terror that I have seen. I only wanted to introduce myself to you. But, you seem like a nice lad." Several of the men nearby who had been listening to the conversation interrupted, begging Simcha to tell them about the other camps.

"All that we have heard is rumors," said an old man. "My granddaughter and her family are in a place called Sobibor." Another man interrupted. "My niece and nephew went to a camp called Buchenwald. Have you been there?" Yet another man cried out, "My father sent a letter from a camp called Dachau. Do you know it?"

Simcha relented. When he spoke again, his voice had changed. He spoke in little more than a raspy whisper. Everyone moved close to him to hear. "Like you, Jacob, I was in Theresienstadt. But that was four years ago, when it was new. I saw a lot of death there, but not much in the way of killing. It was mostly from disease. My last camp was a place called Bergen-Belsen. They left corpses outside all the time there in the winter. Inside the barracks there, we had much disease. Last winter, it seemed that everyone had dysentery. They said that you contracted it from the food. But, we needed every scrap of putrid food that we could get just to stay alive." Simcha curled his lips again and chuckled. "You need the food to live, but something in it kills you!" He laughed some more. No one else was laughing. They continued to stare at him. Simcha continued. "The stench had become intolerable. One night, I went out in search of clean air. In the back of the crematoria, I saw hundreds of corpses stacked like so much firewood. That was what happened when the crematoria was not operating."

"Where else were you?" asked Jacob. Simcha closed his eyes again. He winced at some thought. Jacob suddenly realized how painful this was for Simcha.

The next time he spoke, his voice was lower. It was mournful. "Before I was in Bergen-Belsen, I was in a camp called Treblinka. Jacob, it was hell on earth. Treblinka was a killing factory, like here. The commandant was a man named Stangl. It was funny," he laughed. "From the outside, it looked like nothing – perhaps a large park or agricultural commune. There were trees and

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bushes everywhere. It was beautifully landscaped. But, inside of those trees and bushes were watchtowers, electrified fences, anti-tank obstacles and barbed wire. Dear God, the barbed wire was everywhere. But, from the outside, it was perfect camouflage. In front of the entrance to the gas-chambers there were usually several Ukrainians standing by with dogs. The Ukrainians used these vicious dogs to drive the victims in. If someone did not cooperate, they used knives on them, often wounding them severely. I will never forget how ruthless those Ukrainians were. The victims were driven into the gas-chambers with their hands up, so that as many might be squeezed in as possible and small children were piled on top.” Simcha stopped to wipe his eyes.

After a moment, Simcha continued. “At Treblinka, they used carbon monoxide to kill us. The poison gas was produced by diesel engines and pumped in through ceiling pipes camouflaged as shower heads. There was a passageway from the selection area to the gas chambers. It was a narrow fenced-in passage that they called “the tube.” Many of the victims realized that they were going to their death and, when they resisted, they were beaten, clubbed with rifle butts and whipped by the camp staff. As I was leaving, in September 1942, several new and larger gas chambers were being constructed. God only knows how many they are killing there now. There were about 40 SS officers and about 150 Ukrainian guards.”

Simcha paused for a long moment. His eyes were far away, back in the other dreadful camp. “They made extensive use of Jewish prisoners there too – special work units. When these workers became too weak to do their work they were killed and replaced by younger and stronger inmates. Their job included the removal of gold teeth, dentures, and other valuables from the corpses. They were forced to transport the corpses to mass graves for burial, and later, when the bodies were exhumed, we had to burn the victim’s bodies on iron grates.” Simcha had to stop. His hands trembled as he used them to wipe away fresh tears.

Everyone remained quiet as Simcha collected himself. Finally, he continued. “The Germans called us Sonderkommando. That was their name for our unit. It was pure hell.” He paused, closed his eyes and winced again. Jacob could almost feel his pain. “That was my job, until I was moved. About a year later, when I was at Bergen-Belsen, I heard a rumor that the Sonderkommando at Treblinka had rebelled. They fought the SS with sticks and rocks. I heard a guard say that over two hundred of the prisoners escaped!”

Simcha began to cry silently. Tears streamed down his face, falling to the straw mattress underneath. His body was wracked with heaving and sobbing, while he covered his face with his hands. Jacob and another man tried to comfort him, but Simcha pushed them away. “That is enough,” cried Jacob to the barracks. “You don’t need to tell us any more.

Angrily, Simcha wiped the tears away and spoke, this time in a louder, firm voice. “Yes, I must finish. I must tell you what I have seen. You see, if I die, someone else must be able to tell the story about these atrocities. Someone must tell the world about the injustice done to our people. So, I will finish my story, if you promise to remember it.” Jacob was astounded. From deep inside, Jacob felt the importance of Simcha’s words. All other thoughts faded away. *At least*

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one of us must survive in order to tell the world what the Nazis had done to innocent people. I promise to dedicate myself to this task. I will collect not only anecdotal information about the atrocities, but physical evidence as well. Even a cripple can do that. I promise to remember. I promise to tell the world.

Simcha looked back at the ceiling and closed his eyes. "Before that, I helped to build a camp called Sobibor, in Eastern Poland. He looked at the old man whose granddaughter had been sent to Sobibor. His face expressed deep sadness. "By the time that I left, they had five working gas chambers. The crematoria could not keep pace with the killing. Oh, dear God. I saw tens of thousands of people killed there. They took the ashes from the crematoria and dumped them into the Bug River. Sometimes, when the crematoria were insufficient, we burned and buried corpses. My God, I picked up so many corpses. I tried to get used to it, but it never worked. You see, it was the children that bothered me the most." Simcha was sobbing again. His eyes were wide open, brimming with tears. Although he looked at the ceiling, Jacob understood that in his mind, he was back in that camp and he was looking at the bodies of small children.

"Do you have any children, Jacob?" asked Simcha.

Jacob smiled briefly. "My wife was pregnant when I was recaptured. She should have had our baby by now.

"Well then," continued Simcha. "You can imagine how terrifying it is to have to transport those tiny, frail bodies. The children... Oh God, the children. They had their whole lives ahead of them. None of them did anything to the Germans. Why did they have to die?" Simcha fell into another fit of crying. Gradually, everyone turned away and left him alone. Jacob put his arm around Simcha and tried to comfort him, just as Simcha had done for him only a few minutes earlier. Then, Simcha's voice returned, muffled underneath his hands. "My wife and my two daughters were killed at Sobibor. A day later, I had to burn their bodies." Jacob felt his pain and began to cry. They cried next to each other for many minutes.

Simcha finally stopped crying and put his arm on Jacob's shoulder. "My dear young friend, you have no idea how many of us die every day and night in the multitude of German camps. I cannot begin to tell you all of the names that I have heard. These German prison camps number in the dozens, if not hundreds! But, you see they move prisoners around, from camp to camp. Wherever they needed labor, they moved us. So, I met people who had been in camps all over Europe. It's not just Poland and Germany, Jacob."

Simcha's face changed. Some wicked thought had twisted his face into a dreadful frown. "In each camp, prisoners died from starvation, from disease and from being overworked. In each of the camps, I have seen malaria, typhus, tuberculosis and dysentery. However, a friend in my barracks at Sobibor told me something that he had witnessed at a prison called Dachau." Simcha glanced uneasily at the man who said that his father had been sent there. "This man told me that the Germans performed experiments upon the prisoners. The Germans had selected his barracks for experiments in high altitude and extreme cold. For days, he and the men in his barracks stood in line waiting their turn to enter

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airtight chambers built by the Germans. In one chamber, the air was gradually eliminated, to simulate high altitude. They measured how long a person could live under such conditions. The other chamber was a customized freezer. Again, the Germans measured life expectancy in freezing conditions. The experiments stopped just before it was his turn.”

Simcha lay back in his bunk and stared up at the ceiling. The next time he spoke, he sounded exhausted. “Jacob, this Nazi evil is everywhere. They have conquered most of Europe and now they mean to liquidate the Jewish race. It is the purpose of this camp to exterminate Jews from Europe. You must prepare yourself both physically and mentally. Jacob, you must survive to tell the world what has happened here.”

Jacob immediately understood and accepted the role. “I will survive to tell the world,” he said in a firm tone.

Suddenly, a new voice was heard. It was the old Rabbi, who had apparently been listening. “There is one more thing to remember here, my friend. Never volunteer for Block 11. That place is a certain death sentence.”

Simcha asked, “What happens there?”

The old man replied, “Why, that is where they house the Sonderkommando here.” During the intermittent silence, Jacob felt uncomfortable, as though he should speak. But he forced himself to remain silent. For some reason, he felt compelled to listen. Something inside told him that this man, Simcha, was telling him something so important that it might save his life.

An emaciated man who was on the other side of Jacob’s bunk suddenly entered the conversation. “Tell Jacob about the orchestra.” Jacob turned to look at the man, who spoke with a raspy, high-pitched voice. He had large black circles around eyes which bulged out from his head, making him resemble some sort of wild-eyed insect. For a split-second, with just a shaft of light upon the area, Jacob watched as two fleas jumped from the torn mattress onto the man’s scalp. Jacob shivered, wondering if he too would soon look like that poor man.

“Yes, yes,” replied Simcha. “I was planning to tell him about the orchestra,” he pleaded.

Simcha continued, although Jacob could see that he was growing increasingly weak. His voice had become feeble. “Jacob, the Nazis keep a Jewish orchestra here. Actually, some members of the orchestra are Russians and Poles. I think there might be a Gypsy as well. But it’s mostly a Jewish orchestra. Jacob, you should report to the barracks commander that you are a musician. He can put you on the waiting list. Did you bring your violin?”

Jacob thought for a moment. When did he last see it? He knew that it was on the train with him from Theresienstadt. “I had to leave it on the train when we arrived here.” Simcha grasped Jacob’s arm.

“Don’t worry, my young friend,” said Simcha with a wry smile. “I know where I can get one for you. But you’ll have to make the orchestra on your own.”

Jacob was suddenly overcome with emotion. He began to cry. Simcha asked, “What is it?”

Jacob collected his emotions and began speaking in a shaky voice. “When I entered Theresienstadt, my talent on the violin was mediocre. I was perhaps the

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second or third best player in our school orchestra. But the talent in the orchestra at Theresienstadt was astounding. Most of those people were actually among the best in their city. I suddenly became the worst player. But they taught me how to improve. They drove me to be successful. By the time most of them had been deported, I was playing much better than I thought possible.” Jacob looked down at the floor, as heavy tears dropped from his sleepy eyes. “There was one man, more than anyone, who helped me to improve. His name was Gideon Klein. He was only 23 years old when he arrived in Theresienstadt. Imagine that! He was just three years older than me. But, Simcha, his talent was undeniable. I swear to you, that he played violin like a master. And, he was so patient with me. Each day I learned something new from him, as he had from his master. I suppose that he is now dead.”

Simcha patted Jacob on the arm softly. “Well, young Jacob, he might have given you enough talent to survive here.”

Jacob clearly heard someone from behind say, “a little longer, that is.”

The conversation continued, but Jacob was not listening. He had something new to think about. Suddenly, he was wide awake. His heart rate jumped. He could think of nothing but the orchestra. *With my bad leg, it could be the only way to survive here! I must join the orchestra. They must allow me to join! He made a mental note to contact the orchestra leader as quickly as possible. If only there was a way for me to practice!*

Following another long and uneasy silence, the old Rabbi spoke again. The old man felt it was his duty to explain the workings of the camp to new prisoners. By now, his speech had been well-memorized. “Now listen. You will receive only enough food here to keep you barely alive. Never allow someone to steal your bread, or take your food. Food here is precious. You will receive a small piece of bread and one dollop of gruel for breakfast. If you can sleep at all, you will be awakened at 5:00 a.m., to get ready for work. First, you stand at attention in lines five deep outside. Then, we walk half a kilometer to the canteen, where we receive our meager breakfast. If you drop it, you will get no more. If you turn your back or avert your eyes, someone will steal it. You will have no additional food until after you have worked all day. Your supper will consist of watery soup, containing a few vegetables, along with another small piece of stale bread. On occasion, you may find a small piece meat in the soup. Do not ask or think about where it may have come from. You can expect to receive much less food each day than your body requires. So, you will continue to lose weight. However, you must work on your feet each day and walk over two kilometers back and forth to the factory.”

Then, the old Rabbi turned from Simcha to Jacob. “Jacob, you are a smart young man. You know a lot about medicine. How long can a man continue to work hard each day with such a small amount of food?” Jacob assumed that this was a rhetorical question. Simcha remained silent, either waiting for a response from Jacob, or lost again in his thoughts.

Finally, Jacob spoke. “A person can live without water for no more than a week. Without food, one can live for a few weeks, at most. Based upon the food we get here, I'd say that a prisoner might live several months, assuming they are

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not deliberately killed or fall prey to disease.”

The Rabbi continued. “As I said, only those lucky enough to have a work assignment can continue to stay alive here. After our small breakfast, we walk over two kilometers to the Farben rubber factory. There, we must stand and work all day, with only two short breaks to sit. There is another factory here. But you have to be a scientist to work there. The German scientists use mixtures of lime, coal and water in an attempt to produce rubber and petroleum. None of us are allowed there. Sometimes the munitions factory is closed, if they do not have delivery of parts or the machines break down. Then, we work much harder, on the railroad. They force us to break apart rocks and carry them long distances, to repair or extend the rail lines. There are many rail lines here, Simcha. We pray that the factory should remain open and running. When we work on the railroad, many of us die each day.” The Rabbi again paused for perhaps two to three minutes, leaving an uneasy silence.

He suddenly began speaking again, but this time in a low, serious tone. “There are other jobs here at Auschwitz. And as bad as it may seem to stand in a factory all day, or to break rocks and carry them, you must understand that those are the very best jobs in this camp of starvation, disease and death.” Jacob’s heart began to pound, for he already knew what the old man was about to tell him. He knew it because of his nightmare. It was the ugly suspicion that everyone tried to bury in their subconscious minds. It was the evil rumor that had spread throughout the European Jewish population, now come true despite its improbability. Jacob did not want to hear the Rabbi’s explanation. For it would confirm his nightmare as reality. He looked down and saw that his hands were shaking. He quickly hid them.

The Rabbi began to speak again, although Jacob could barely hear him this time. “Sometimes we must do unthinkable things, just to stay alive. You see, death awaits us all here. There is no way to escape and no way to survive. Yet, as humans, we will struggle and do whatever it takes to live one day longer. We cannot help being who we are.” Jacob trembled. *Here it comes!* His heart was pounding so hard, he wondered if it might break, or stop. The old man continued in his eulogy voice. “When we are out of work, or when we are too sick or frail, we become worthless to the Germans. So, we either go to Barracks XXI, to be gassed – or we become that which we hate so much; a kapo.

“Kapos survive here a little longer because they receive more food – sometimes a lot more food. In return, they control the Jews upon their arrival in the camp. Most Jews believe that no other Jew would participate in killing them. So, they are easy to control on the way to the gas chamber.” He stopped for another long extemporaneous pause. With his heart pounding and his body covered in sweat, Jacob waited to hear the old man say that which he already understood. *I have waited three years to hear this man describe the job that I had in my nightmare.* Jacob felt as though his skin was crawling. More than anything, he wanted to be far away. Finally, the Rabbi continued.” My sons, there are jobs that a kapo performs beyond controlling Jews as they arrive. Now, prepare yourself for something very bad.”

Although more than three years had passed, the terrifying details of Jacob’s

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nightmare arose within him, fresh and foreboding. Like a gruesome flashback, Jacob recalled the crematoria, the sound of the roaring fire, the horrible stench of burning flesh, those red brick walls, the same striped pajamas that he now wore and the SS officer who killed him. He shuddered uncontrollably. Simcha noticed this and again put his arm around Jacob. "I know that you are afraid to hear this, my friend." Jacob looked up at Simcha. His eyes were sparkling in the light of an overhead bulb. From a distance, they looked hazel. But now, he could see that they were indeed blue. They had the look of deep wisdom and intelligence. Jacob thought that they engendered compassion and respect. He also noticed how Simcha had started to call him, "my friend." For one reason or another, Jacob had found a true comrade.

Jacob spoke before Simcha could continue. "Let me tell you, Simcha, what the Rabbi is about to say." He glanced at the Rabbi briefly. "Some kapos have to take the dead bodies from the room where they are killed and carry them to another part of the building, where they are burned. This crematorium has large red brick walls and an enormous fireplace. There are six openings on each side. The roar of the fire is deafening. And, the smell is appalling. Metal trays are used to push the bodies into the fire. The room is filled with chaos, because the guards work us like animals. Always there is shouting and cursing. The fire sounds like a locomotive at high speed. We constantly choke on the smoke and ash. Some kapos carry the bodies in. There is an elevator from another part of the building. Two kapos are usually required to carry adults. Most kapos carry children by a leg or an arm, flinging them to their place before the flames. They carry children as though they were a log for a fireplace or..." Jacob stopped as he began to cry. Simcha rolled his hand up and down Jacob's back to comfort him.

Tears rolled down Jacob's face as he forced himself to continue in a whisper. He was shaking. Everyone nearby stared at him with wide eyes and open mouths. "Usually, there are only females or males. They are of all ages. Their heads have been shaved and their eyes are usually wide open. Mostly they are new arrivals who fail to pass selection. Sometimes they come from here, a barracks that was punished or a Sonderkommando unit that is scheduled for death. But, it doesn't matter because most people don't live very long here anyway." Jacob's voice was rising with anxiety with each word. He was terrified to tell the story of his nightmare. But, now that it was coming out, he felt more than ever that he must tell it. There was a catharsis in the telling. He continued, his heart pounding, his eyes wide open. In his mind, he could see the room, as if it was happening over again. "The bodies look mostly normal, except without hair. Those who have been prisoners for a long time look malnourished. But, the faces on the bodies are what you remember the most." Jacob lost his composure again and stopped. With an anguished expression, he spoke again. "Some of their faces seem to be frozen in torment."

Jacob had to stop. His chest was heaving with each breath. His forehead was covered in sweat. Tears rolled down his cheeks, settling upon his trousers. Mucous appeared underneath his nose. He wiped it away quickly. Finally, marshalling all of his cognitive power, with tears rolling down his face, Jacob contin-

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ued in halting words. “Many of the bodies have froth around their lips. If they have been lying for a while undisturbed, their bodies become very white on top and bluish-purple on the bottom. It’s where the blood has settled. Their eyes stare at you, pleading for help.” Everyone in the barracks was now tuned into his words.

Jacob inhaled deeply and continued, with a little more strength in his voice. “Also, in this room there are four or five SS guards. They wear black uniforms and carry machine guns. They shout and scream at us to move faster. Always they scream at us to work harder and faster. ‘Schnell, schnell, schnell, they scream at us.’ They call us ‘stupid, worthless Jews.’ And always, Simcha, the room is filled with ashes. The ashes are everywhere – in our eyes, on our faces, on our bodies. We breathe them into our lungs. But the sound of the fire is terrible. It’s deafening. That’s part of why the Nazis have to shout at us. Once in a while, we stop the fire to remove the ashes. Then we have to carry mountains of ashes on carts and wheelbarrows out from the crematorium. Sometimes, we carry them into the countryside, to the Polish farmers. There, we are told to spread the ashes out upon their fields. Sometimes we carry the ashes all the way to the river and dump them in. You see, Simcha, the Jews of Europe have become fertilizer for Polish farmers, or food for the fish.”

Simcha pulled himself away from Jacob with wide open eyes, as though Jacob carried the plague or some terrible illness. He stared at Jacob for a moment; eyes blinking and mouth agape. The old Rabbi said, “Jacob, you have been here before, haven’t you?” Jacob saw that the old man was disturbed.

“No,” Jacob whispered. “Today is my first day, I swear it.” The room suddenly erupted in mumbling, as everyone decided to express his opinion at the same time.

Simcha continued to stare at Jacob as though he was looking at some terrible vision. Suddenly, he looked up and spoke, this time in a loud and stern voice. “Then you have heard about the crematorium from someone else. Or, you did these things at some other camp.” Simcha waited for Jacob’s reply, still staring at him with great concern.

After a brief, yet pregnant pause, Jacob replied. “No, Simcha. It was a nightmare that I had more than three years ago.” Jacob moved closer and said in a low voice, “I’ve never had another dream like that one, Simcha. It was so vivid and filled with detail that I could have sworn I was really there – I mean here. It seemed so real to me that I felt as though I was really dying.”

Simcha’s eyes suddenly darkened. When he spoke, he no longer whispered. This time he was almost shouting, and everyone was listening. “Someone has told you about the crematorium or you have been here before, in which case you have been lying to me. You dare to pretend that you have not been here!” Almost all of the men in the barracks stopped their conversations to look up at Simcha, whose face was now red with anger. Simcha struggled to compose himself. He was a good man who was slow to anger. But he could not understand how Jacob knew about the crematorium without being there or hearing about it from someone else.

The old Rabbi got up and glared directly into Jacob’s eyes. Jacob had the

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feeling that he was being tested by this de-factor leader of the barracks. It was clear that everyone respected him. He had heard them praying with the old man after dinner. Now, the Rabbi's eyes were blazing with fury. The old man stood eye-to-eye with Jacob, glaring at him. Jacob had always regarded his thoughts and memories as private. Suddenly, that privacy was removed. Jacob broke the stare and looked down. He was surprised to find that his hands were trembling. Perspiration dripped from his neck. Jacob felt that the old man had somehow taken an x-ray of his soul. Finally, the Rabbi spoke. "I can see that you are telling the truth. I do not know how it is true. But, the sign of God is with you. Jacob, you have been sent here for a reason. Your life has a purpose here."

Jacob exploded with joy. Finally someone understood his problem. *For such a long time, I have been isolated. For so long, I have been afraid to speak of it. I thought that people would mock me or think me mad!* "Rabbi?" asked Jacob. "Why am I here? What does God want me to do?" *The moment of truth has arrived!* The old man stared into Jacob's eyes for a moment. Jacob again felt a sensation of being mentally invaded. Yet, he trusted the wise old man. For a moment, he thought he saw recognition in the old man's bright blue eyes.

Finally, the old man spoke. "Jacob, I do not know what God wants you to do. I can only say that you will know what to do at the correct time. You must be patient, stay alive and trust that God will show you the path." The old man collapsed into his lower-level bunk and fell asleep.

After a moment of silence, Simcha looked at Jacob. "I was just about to tell you," Simcha said, "about the worst work that kapos do for the Germans." He said this in a soft, frail voice. "But you sound as though you have already done it." He paused, and smiled. Jacob thought that it was not a smile of friendship. Rather, it was the kind of uneasy smile that one might give to someone who is dying. "I have no idea how you could know so much about this palace of terror without having been here before," Simcha continued. "But I believe you when you say that you have never been here or have spoken with someone who was here. I believe that what the Rabbi said is true. Jacob, you have been blessed by God. You have a role to play here. And, I promise to do everything in my power to assist you!"

The room erupted in defiant argument. Everyone was talking at the same time. It was so loud that Jacob was unable to hear any individual person. He heard someone say, "Liar." Another man said, "He made it up to impress us." Then everything else was swollen in the cacophony of the crowded conversations. Suddenly, to Jacob's amazement, the racket stopped. It was as though someone had turned a switch, he thought. Then, he saw the Rabbi's raised hand. Jacob was amazed at the command this old man had upon everyone. *These people must worship him like a God.*

In the brief silence that followed, Jacob felt in awe of this old man. The Rabbi had the look of a prophet. Gazing directly into Jacob's eyes, he said softly, "Jacob, God has given you a vision of this place. I do not know why, but you must search for the answer." Jacob's heart was pounding. Since his nightmare, he had harbored the possibility that the dream was a message from God. His scientific knowledge told him that it was nothing important – only a dream. Still,

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the potential importance of the dream was never far from his conscious thoughts. With each passing day, the idea that he could be a part of God's plans had plagued him. *Yet, what kind of God would allow his chosen people to be slaughtered on such a huge scale?*

"I have had the same feeling, Rabbi," Jacob said in a soft but shaky voice. "It feels as though I was meant to be here. If God has a plan for me, I think that it has something to do with this place. But what is it that I am supposed to do?" Jacob's mind was spinning. Now, more than ever, he was certain that he was meant to do something here, in this camp of extermination. Like a splinter in his mind, gouging, pressing, and painful, that vision was omnipresent and yet without clear meaning. He felt like screaming.

Simcha put his arm around Jacob's shoulders again. "Yes, Jacob," he whispered, "I feel something that I can't explain when I speak with you. I feel it even being near you. There is something about you and this place. Call it destiny, or perhaps God's will. You are here for a reason, Jacob Silverman. And that reason is not for you to die. Perhaps it is for you to save others. Perhaps it is only to give us hope. I do not know the answer, Jacob. But I do know that it is your destiny to discover the truth about why you are here." With that, Simcha turned around and walked back to his bunk. The room was immersed in various hushed conversations. Jacob decided to return to his bunk as well, rather than hear the others talk about him. But he also sensed that the others feared him.

Chapter 44

Josef Mengele

At the same time, in the camp's main medical center block, Dr. Moshe Silverman sat in a dimly lit laboratory with six other physicians. A long rectangular blackboard covered the wall in front. Another side of the room contained long, deep shelves, filled with specimen jars of all shapes and sizes. The formaldehyde-filled jars contained a wide variety of human organs. A large laboratory table with sinks, beakers, test tubes and gas outlets was in front of the blackboard. The physicians talked quietly among themselves. All but two of them were Jews. Like Moshe, they had arrived recently in various transports.

The Jewish doctors were made to wear lab coats with a Star of David upon the front pocket. None of the others spoke with, or even looked at, the Jewish doctors. There were several gentile physicians in the room. They huddled together, speaking Polish. The new physicians were surrounded by uniformed SS guards and German physicians, who stood behind and around the sides of the room.

Moshe glanced into the next room, through a partly open doorway. Upon an examination table, lay a young naked girl. She was perhaps twelve or thirteen years old. Moshe walked into the room. The girl had long autopsy incisions across her chest and abdomen. Flaps of skin were opened to reveal her internal organs. She looked as though she had not been dead long. He gazed at her in wonder. *Rigor has not set in yet. Who could she be and why did she have to die?* Her silky, long dark hair fell across the side of the examination table. She was beautiful. Moshe stared at her. *What is her name? Where did she live? Why did her precious life have to end so abruptly?* She reminded him of Rachael. *She is so beautiful. She is so innocent.* Walking slowly back to his seat in the main laboratory room, Moshe thought of the Talmud. *It teaches that when you take someone's life, it is like taking the life of everyone. Similarly, when you save a life, it is as though you saved the entire world.* That thought hung over Moshe's mind, like a thick, dark cloud. Then, he thought of the oath that he took when he became a physician. "First, do no harm," whispered Moshe as he sat down.

Suddenly, he heard a whisper from behind. "I have her liver." Moshe turned around in his chair and stared at the person who spoke to him. He was a middle-aged man with short brown hair and a thin moustache. His lab coat indicated that he was Jewish. He looked at Moshe with sad brown eyes through round, rimless glasses. The man shrugged his shoulders at Moshe, and said, "You seemed interested."

Moshe asked, "Why was her head not shaved? Why does she appear less malnourished?"

The doctor with sad eyes replied, "Because Mengele takes better care of the young ones. He wants them as healthy as possible for his ... research."

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Moshe said nothing, amazed at the intricacies in this nightmare world. “You see,” continued the other Jewish doctor, “He’s particularly interested in making it easy for the Aryan race to have multiple births.” Moshe was amazed. *This “research” is dedicated to conquering the world.* Deep in thought, Moshe vowed to do anything that he could to damage this outrageous plan.

The man smiled briefly and extended his hand to Moshe, in a friendly manner. “I’m Albert Goldman,” he said in a deep voice. “I’m an orthopedic surgeon, from Mannheim.” Moshe shook the man’s hand. “What’s your specialty?” the man whispered.

Moshe replied, “General practice and surgery. I’m from a rather small city with few physicians.” He smiled weakly at Albert.

Moshe observed that there was something strange about Goldman. Each spoken word and all of his movements seemed slow. His speech was slightly slurred. He seemed anxious. Nevertheless, Goldman pursued the conversation. He glanced at the others to make sure they weren’t eavesdropping. “Has anyone told you what we do here?” Moshe shook his head. “I tell you, Moshe, most days here are beyond your worst nightmares. Just last week, Mengele actually cut a huge incision along the sides of two perfectly healthy identical twins, and then forced me to suture them together. This was his experiment to create Siamese twins. Of course, they lived only a few days before dying from septicemia. I swear to you that he drew sketches of the twins, to show me what he expected.” Moshe looked down and saw that Albert’s hands were shaking.

Goldman continued, in his monotone, slurred manner. “Two weeks ago, Mengele selected six people from Barracks XI who had brown eyes. Then, he forced me to inject the eyes of those healthy people with a substance that he developed. He said that it would change the color of their eyes to blue. Needless to say, all six patients became permanently blind. Their eyes did not change color.”

Moshe thought that Goldman appeared somewhat pale. He was perspiring, despite the cold room temperature. He looked around the room to see if anyone was listening. Then, he continued in a whisper. “Mengele forces us to do horrible things, or he will send us to the gas chamber. In December, we gave many, many people large amounts of radiation. He then forced them to copulate, to see if they had twins. Only two of the subjects survived the radiation poisoning. Who knows how much longer any of us will live?”

As Albert was about to speak again, he suddenly stopped. His faint smile disappeared. He stared forward, as though in abject obedience. Moshe found the reaction strange. He resembled a dog that has been commanded to attention by its master. Suddenly, the left side of Moshe’s face erupted in pain. He swiveled back in his chair and saw a black-uniformed Nazi guard with a whip in his hand. He glared at Moshe through fierce blue eyes. The young soldier was at the ready, waiting for an order from his master to swing the whip down at Moshe again. Moshe was shocked by such brutal treatment for he had done nothing to deserve it. He tasted blood in his mouth and could feel it running down his neck into the collar of his shirt.

A tall middle-aged man with dark hair combed straight back entered the

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room. The man who commanded such rigid attention stood well over six feet tall. He wore a sparkling white lab coat, dark gray and black tie and a white silk shirt. Light sparkled from a red, gold and black swastika pin upon his left coat lapel. The man's dark hair gleamed under the bright laboratory lights, as did his thin dark moustache. He was barrel-chested and looked to be in very good physical shape. Moshe struggled to see the name that had been embroidered upon the lab coat in light blue. Alas, from his distance it was impossible.

Mengele looked directly at Moshe for several seconds before he spoke. A chill went up and down Moshe's spine. Although he could not explain why, Moshe was certain that the man staring into his eyes was evil. His eyes were black as coal. Moshe felt cold whenever Mengele's eyes were upon him. He radiated pure, intense malevolence. Moshe felt as though the devil himself was staring him down. His heart was racing and his respiration had increased. There was an unnatural tightness in his chest. He wiped sweat from his brow with a handkerchief. Finally, he could no longer look into the man's eyes. It was too painful.

After a long pause, the man spoke. "Good evening, colleagues," he said in a deep resonating voice. "For those of you who are new, my name is Dr. Joseph Mengele. You have been spared from death because you are physicians. Furthermore, you will now have the privilege of participating in the most advanced and important research in the history of modern medicine. Many of you have the talent to enhance our project's conclusion." He emphasized the word "enhance." Moshe was deeply afraid to hear about his medical experiments. *He wants me to participate. Well, I will participate all right. And, I will do the greatest amount of damage that I can!* Mengele continued. "Here, in this place, we can experiment freely and without restraint. Our goal here is to harness the greatest power known to mankind. Of course, I speak of the power of genetics." Moshe and three or four of the other physicians looked at each other. He suspected that these were the "new" people that Mengele had referred to. Everyone else sat at attention and stared straight forward, as though their lives depended upon it.

Mengele droned on. "Yes my friends, you will join me, our talented SS physicians and my colleague Eduard Wirths, in uncovering the greatest power of the universe – the power of genetics. It will be our glorious task to multiply the birth rate of the Aryan people. We will give our Fuehrer the power to give each Aryan family twins at each birth. Ultimately, our gift will provide Germany the power to conquer the world." Moshe looked around the room. Each physician stared ahead, expressionless. *This is a madman. He must be stopped! Am I the only one who comprehends this?*

Mengele continued, "We begin by studying twins, triplets or, in the rare case, quadruplets. We know that such children are genetically similar. But, those who were raised apart may or may not acquire various diseases. Thus, we can discover at the genetic level why people get sick. There are many far-reaching characteristics for us to study. Of course, as is the case with all research, many failures predate each success. We will need to impregnate many, many women just to have the one success that we desire. But here, in this place, we have an almost endless supply of fertile research subjects." Moshe winced as Mengele

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referred to innocent women as “research subjects.” He assumed that by de-humanizing the prisoners, it would be easier to kill them.

Moshe wished to be anywhere but there. As Mengele continued, Moshe began to wonder how he could throw a wrench into the Nazi “research.” Mengele continued his prepared speech. “By studying fertile women’s bodies during various stages of life, we will discover the secrets of genetics and the power of genetic selection. We can select one race, for example the Jewish race, for elimination. At the same time, we can multiply the Aryan birthrate to its logical conclusion. The extermination of the Jewish problem is only the beginning. Soon, we will have a gene pool of pure Aryan characteristics.” He paused for a moment, looking at each new person in the room. He smiled briefly. “Please join me in the greatest research project in the history of mankind.” Just as quickly, his smile disappeared.

Mengele’s face was unlike any that Moshe had ever seen. One after another, expressions replaced each other. His top teeth appeared and his lower jaw jutted out. His eyes opened wide. His bushy, dark eyebrows turned down towards the center of his face. He reminded Moshe of a picture of the devil that he had seen as a child. Suddenly, a shiver ran up and down Moshe’s spine and his heart skipped a beat. Mengele continued, with a snarl. “If you will not cooperate, I will send you directly to special treatment. I’m sure that by now all of you know what that means. In many cases, your families are already dead. You will be dead as well, should you fail to help us.”

Then, just as quickly as he had become a devil, Mengele became an angel. His brows lifted, his jaw retracted, his teeth disappeared and his voice lowered to a whisper. He softly said, “I’m sure that you will cooperate. And, I welcome you to Auschwitz, the greatest human biology research center in the world!” Mengele gave the room a broad smile, swiveled and walked out. The Polish and German physicians, along with some of the guards began to applaud the evil doctor. Moshe and the Jewish physicians sat mute in their chairs, looking at each other for guidance. Moshe felt a chill moving up and down his spine.

Mengele stopped at the doorway and turned around to face the new physicians. “Here,” he continued, “you physicians will have the single greatest research opportunity of your lifetime. You are, after all, scientists. Together, we will discover the mysteries of the human body in a way that is impossible elsewhere.” Moshe observed that Mengele was so excited that spittle flew from his mouth as he spoke. “We will be able to set conditions and perform medical experiments here that will yield invaluable contributions to medical science. I know that you do not want to be here. But try to make the best out of this situation.” With that, Mengele swiftly walked through the door and was gone.

The next morning, Moshe was introduced to Dr. Carl Clauberg. Clauberg was a non-descript middle-aged man with the ubiquitous short, squat brown mustache. Like Mengele, his hair was full of grease and slicked back from his brow. His dark eyes darted back and forth among the physicians. Moshe was told that he would be assisting Clauberg with some important research at the infirmary. After a brief conversation with some of the other doctors, Clauberg turned to address Moshe. “Silverman, you will be helping me with experiments

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on sterilization in the camp. Part of Block No. 10 in the Main Camp has been put at our disposal.” Before Moshe had a chance to speak, Clauberg continued. “I have developed a method of non-surgical mass sterilization that consists of introducing into the female reproductive organs a specially prepared chemical irritant that produces severe inflammation. Within just a few weeks, the fallopian tubes will grow shut and remain blocked. Some of our subjects will die during the experiment, due to pre-existing disease. Some will die soon after due to infection. The others will eventually be put to death so that autopsies can be performed.” Moshe was dazed by Clauberg’s audacious “research experiment.” The fact that his subjects were human beings, rather than rats, appeared to make no difference. The fact that many would die did not faze him at all. Moshe realized that he too meant little more to Clauberg than an educated rat. Clauberg continued, “Silverman, you will be responsible for autopsies in this experiment. Each and every subject must be autopsied.” Clauberg emphasized the word “must.” “And,” he continued, “You will die if your work does not meet my standards!”

Since he had arrived at Auschwitz, Moshe discovered that his chest pain had returned with exertion or stress. It was back now in full force. He had trouble maintaining Clauberg’s pace. Moshe tried to catch his breath. It felt like he was in high altitude. “Silverman,” Clauberg continued. “If I discover that even one of our subjects was not autopsied, I will have you put to death.”

Moshe interjected between stressed breaths, “But, Dr. Clauberg, what about those who survive the process?”

It was an innocent question. Moshe had assumed that autopsies would be conducted on those who died because of the experiment, or who failed to survive the process. But, he assumed, many innocent women would survive the experiment. Suddenly, Clauberg stopped and put his face just inches from Moshe’s face. Suddenly, he began to scream at Moshe. “What did I just tell you, you stupid Jew?” Spittle flew from his mouth, some of it landing upon Moshe’s face. Clauberg’s breath was horrid.

Moshe tried to speak. “Herr Doctor Clauberg, you said that autopsies would be performed.” Suddenly, Clauberg swung his arm around, slapping the side of Moshe’s face so hard that he fell to the cold, hard floor. Moshe looked up at Clauberg, the left side of his face stinging. “I was wondering about those who survive.” Upon hearing this, Clauberg kicked Moshe as hard as possible; his foot landing upon Moshe’s left ribs. The pain was unbearable. Moshe suspected that at least one of his ribs was broken. He was stung by sharp pain as he inhaled.

Clauberg lumbered over Moshe screaming. “ALL SUBJECTS ARE TO BE AUTOPSIED! Is that clear, you stupid, stinking Jew?”

Moshe looked up at Clauberg, blinking. The pain on the side of his face paled in comparison to the pain from his newly broken ribs. He sat on the floor in disbelief. *This man would have me kill innocent women, just to conduct an autopsy! And that would be only after we inject a dangerous chemical into her uterus that will painfully block her fallopian tubes forever.* Moshe looked up at Clauberg. “Are you saying that it is my responsibility to sterilize innocent women, and then to kill those who survive the sterilization process?” Moshe’s head was

spinning. "I cannot do this," he said quietly in Yiddish.

"What was that you said, Silverman?" demanded Clauberg. Moshe looked up at this despicable excuse for a physician and quietly said, "I said that I can do this, Herr Doctor." Without warning, Clauberg kicked Moshe again. Fortunately, his aim was bad and his shoe hit Moshe's thigh. The blow did not hurt much. Clauberg stood directly over Moshe. He was livid. He screamed one more time. "And, from now on, you are to call me Herr Professor Doctor Clauberg! Is that understood?"

Then, suddenly, Clauberg's expression changed completely. He smiled and extended his hand to Moshe, helping him get up from the ground. "Here, let me help you up." Moshe grunted in anguish as his broken ribs rubbed against each other. "You know," said Clauberg. "You look terrible. Remind me to examine you later." With that, he turned and walked out of the laboratory, leaving a dazed Moshe alone.

The next morning, Moshe was barely able to lift himself out from his bunk. The pain in his left rib cage was intense. He required assistance to dress. After roll call and his meager breakfast, Moshe walked tenderly towards the infirmary. He trudged through the snow, pain accompanying each and every move. Upon entering the infirmary, Moshe found Clauberg in good spirits. "Silverman, come over here. Good morning! Come have some coffee here." In fact, Clauberg was so pleasant, that it was as though yesterday's argument had not occurred. Moshe could not understand how people could treat each other with such wildly different emotions.

Before rounds each day, the physicians had time to chat with each other. They smoked and drank coffee, when it was available, and discussed various cases and experiments. Goldman was there. He greeted Moshe with a large smile and handshake. However, he became very concerned when he saw how painful it was for Moshe to move. "What's the matter Silverman?" Moshe told him how Clauberg had hit and kicked him. "That's nothing Silverman, said Goldman. You should see him when he's really angry." They laughed for a moment. "Come," said Goldman. "Let's sit down." They sat together in folding chairs next to a small table. Goldman lit a long, cream-colored pipe, producing prodigious puffs of bluish smoke that gently floated to the ceiling.

Moshe was silent for a moment before speaking softly. "Goldman, I just can't understand how they can kick us one moment, then smile and help us the next. How can they behave like this?"

Goldman smiled briefly while looking around the room to see if anyone was listening to them. He then bent forward and spoke quietly. Moshe could barely hear him. "Silverman, it all comes down to one thing. You see, these Nazis don't consider Jewish doctors to be real human beings. To them, we are like intelligent dogs. Thus, they kick us to make us more obedient. Then they smile and pat us on the head when we behave correctly." Moshe thought about that description. It made sense. "That's how they can kill so many of us and not go crazy, eh?" Goldman smiled and nodded his head. "Don't expect any better treatment from the Polish doctors," added Goldman. "Some of them are worse than the SS."

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They sat and smoked in silence for several more minutes. Finally, Moshe spoke in quiet tones. "Goldman, how do you deal with the guilt? How is it possible for Jews to do such things to other Jews?" Goldman puffed on his large curved white pipe, expelling remarkable amounts of blue-gray smoke. He said nothing, yet looked straight at Moshe. For a moment, Moshe thought that Goldman had not heard him. Then, Goldman began to speak softly, almost in a whisper. "Silverman, there is something that you must understand about living here, in this nightmare world. Only three things are important. The most important thing is your family. Some doctors here who collaborate with the Nazis can have their family protected. By that, I mean that they can be kept from the gas chambers. If they are healthy, they can be put on forced labor. You mentioned that you have a son here, yes?" Moshe nodded, with excitement. "Well, if the Nazis are pleased with your work, they may allow you to visit him. Sometimes a relative can be placed into good jobs here." Moshe nodded again, while extinguishing a cigarette. "Second," continued Goldman in a whisper. "Each day that you work means that you can stay alive for another day. Life, my friend, is precious. You must accept that you are human, Silverman. To be human is to want to live another day. Each day that we are alive is a blessing. And third, is that we can do something to damage the Nazi effort. Each day that we remain alive is a day that we may plot against these evil people. I swear to you Silverman, I will gladly give up my life if I can find a way to stop the Nazis. One day soon, I believe that it will happen." Moshe nodded his head in agreement. Suddenly, the door opened and one of the Polish doctors came in. With a grunt, Goldman stood up and used a small pocket knife to extinguish his pipe into a large metal ashtray. As he did, he repeated softly, "one day."

The next morning, Moshe reported to the office of Dr. Clauberg, as ordered. Clauberg, a fastidious middle-aged man with round spectacles, seemed genuinely impressed with Moshe's career, despite its rather mundane turn in Salzburg. He asked if Moshe wouldn't rather have lived in Berlin, Munich or even Paris. Moshe told him that he had been perfectly happy living with his family in Salzburg. Clauberg frowned and turned his back on Moshe. The thought of his dear wife, Hanna, brought tears to his eyes. *Oh God, my dear Hanna. Where are you? I miss you so much!* Moshe unconsciously stroked his short beard. *These murderers killed my wife and now they expect me to have a cheerful conversation.* The anger rose within Moshe, like a volcano. *One day, I promise, I will do whatever I can to damage the Nazi war machine. It would be my pleasure, even if it causes my own death.* After all, life without Hanna could not possibly be rewarding. However, he desperately wished to see Jacob before dying. *But, I must do nothing to jeopardize Jacob's health.*

Later that day, Moshe was called into Clauberg's office. He anticipated another tirade. However, Clauberg was pleasant, offering Moshe a cigarette. He made no mention of yesterday's incident. He spoke of his experimental sterilization process and how important it was to his future success with the Nazi Party. Moshe smoked and listened, nodding his head now and then. He soon felt that same tightness in his chest. Only, this time the pain was more intense and did not soon disappear. *The nicotine is causing my coronary arteries to constrict.* After

ten minutes, Moshe assumed that he would be free to go. He stood up, looking at the doorway.

Clauberg, however, was not done with him. Rising from his desk and moving towards Moshe, he continued. "Silverman, a Dr. Horst Schumann is working on the same general process. I know Schumann. I know his techniques are sloppy. He too is striving to find a method to permanently sterilize women from inferior gene pools. Himmler gave him the right to conduct medical experiments, just like us. But his method involves radiological sterilization. He is giving women massive doses of radiation from the lower abdomen to the bottom of the groin." Clauberg turned swiftly around, again staring at Moshe. "Our method is superior!" He said this in a vicious, arrogant tone.

Moshe moved backward by two to three steps. "Even if radiological sterilization is successful, it will prove to be too expensive and too time consuming." Clauberg seemed to recognize his sudden angry outburst. He forced himself to calm down. In a quiet but firm tone, he said, "We will succeed. Ours is the best method." Moshe realized that Clauberg's career was probably at risk. He was killing innocent women in order to foster his own career. The more angry Moshe became, the more his chest pain increased. He soon became nauseous. Finally, Clauberg was done and Moshe swiftly walked away. He entered the nearby lavatory where he vomited.

Several hundred Jewish women from various countries lived in two large rooms on the second floor of the building called Block 10. They worked in an area of the camp called "Canada," where they sorted the possessions stolen from new prisoners. Moshe was ordered to visit the building and interview the women. On the way, he noticed that the new camp, Birkenau, was operating at full speed. *Jacob, are you there?* The chimneys of the crematoria were belching fire and thick gray smoke. Moshe observed that a Southwesterly wind was blowing the ashes away from the main camp and towards the city of Oswiecim. *The ashes today will bugger up some farmer's field northeast of camp.* In the distance to the Northeast, he heard the sounds of construction. The Nazis were building yet another camp there, to be called "Auschwitz III." Although he heard only rumors, he believed that it could only advance the killing process. As he entered Block 10, he stomped his feet to shake off the snow. Without realizing it, he startled a group of at least thirty women who had been sleeping in the barracks inside. The entire room was fetid. It smelled like feces, urine and disease. Every woman stared at Moshe with fear and surprise.

Moshe's assignment was beyond ghastly. He looked at the frightened women and wondered how he could obey his orders without hurting someone innocent. *What on earth can I tell these poor women?* Moshe stood in the entrance, wondering what to say to them. *If I tell them the truth, they will panic. If I lie to them, how will I be able to sleep at night?* That thought amused Moshe as he rarely slept for more than a few hours anyway. He always had dreams of Hanna. They were mostly pleasant. However, of late she would call to him in his dreams. Each time, he would answer her. But it was as though she could not hear him. Then, he would awaken and remember that she was dead.

Several days ago, while searching for surgical notes, Moshe discovered a

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file folder containing copies of letters that Clauberg had written to his Nazi superiors. The letters frightened Moshe beyond description. His hands were shaking when he finished reading them. In particular, a letter written to Heinrich Himmler just six months ago remained burned into his mind.

He could recall virtually every word.

23 June, 1943

Reichsfuehrer – SS Heinrich Himmler
Schutzstaffel Headquarters
RSHA, Reich Security Main Office, Berlin

Honorable Mr. Reichsfuehrer,

“The non-surgical method of sterilizing women that I have invented is now almost perfected . . . As for the questions that you have directed to me, sir, I can today answer them in the way that I had anticipated: if the research that I am carrying out continues to yield the sort of results that it has produced so far (and there is no reason to suppose that this shall not be the case), then I shall be able to report in the foreseeable future that one experienced physician, with an appropriately equipped office and the aid of ten auxiliary personnel, will be able to carry out in the course of a single day the sterilization of hundreds, or even 1,000 women.”

Sincerely,

Carl Clauberg, M.D.

Moshe interviewed the women and gave a few of them a cursory examination. The poor, frightened women seemed to be from almost every country in Europe. Although a few of the women were Poles and Gypsies, the vast majority were Jews. These females were selected because they were of childbearing age. However, the decrepit conditions at Auschwitz had taken a vast toll on these unfortunate women. Some had been transferred from other camps. Almost all of them suffered from malnutrition. Some had symptoms of typhus or tuberculosis. Despite having their heads shaved, most of them still carried lice. Moshe's heart was broken as he interviewed the women. He had no medication to give them. He understood that they would soon be administered a dangerous chemical, rendering them sterile. But he also knew that they would be killed after the experiment was completed, so that an autopsy could be conducted. Moshe wondered in an offhand manner why the Nazi doctors bothered to kill them before the autopsy. Then, he recalled listening to a man at Theresienstadt who said that he heard that the Germans sometimes operated on prisoners without anesthesia. It had seemed like a ridiculous rumor then. Not so now. No evil that the Nazis could inflict upon innocent people would surprise him now.

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Moshe did not have the heart to tell these women their fate. “What will happen to us, Doctor?” they all asked. “Why have we been selected?”

Each time, Moshe replied, “I don’t make the rules here.” On his way out, Moshe was overwhelmed with grief. He fought the process, but tears fell from his cheeks into the gray and white stubble of his beard. One of the women must have seen him crying, because a great wailing could be heard as he left the interior barracks. He could still hear them crying after the door was closed and a wave of freezing air blasted his unprotected face. *What could be worse than this?* He trudged back through the snow to the infirmary. He stopped at one point to look back at Block 10 and saw two women staring at him from a small window. Wiping tears from his face, he continued through the deep snow. Moshe began to realize that Hanna was fortunate to have had a swift death. In Auschwitz, it seemed, the dead were the fortunate ones.

The next morning, after rounds had been completed at the infirmary, Moshe was told to go to the office of Dr. Josef Mengele. He was shown into the office and told to wait. While waiting, he observed the many certificates upon the walls of the office. Mengele held a Ph.D. and a medical doctorate. According to other physicians in the infirmary, Mengele studied the phenomena of twins, as well as the physiology and pathology of dwarfism at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Genetics, and Eugenics. He was also interested in people with different-colored irises and in the etiology and treatment of noma (“water cancer” of the cheek). This latter disease, widespread in the Gypsy Camp, had been previously almost unknown in Europe. The other physicians told Moshe that Mengele’s first experimental subjects were upon Gypsy children. He had a laboratory in the so-called “Gypsy Family Camp.” On Mengele’s orders, children suffering from noma were put to death in order for pathology investigations to be carried out. Moshe recoiled in fear upon hearing this. Organs and even complete heads of children were preserved and sent in jars to institutions, including the Medical Academy in Graz, Austria. Now, waiting for this evil man, the hairs on the back of Moshe’s neck stood up. A shiver went down his spine. He thought again about the Hippocratic Oath, taken by every physician upon graduation from medical school. “First, do no harm,” is the premise behind every doctor’s practice. Yet, this dastardly Mengele did the exact opposite.

Much of Moshe’s information came from his new friend, Albert Goldman. Goldman told Moshe that Mengele had also begun selecting dwarves and persons with physical peculiarities such as disabilities and developmental defects from the Jewish transports. They were often brought directly to Birkenau for extermination. Many had come from Theresienstadt, and from the so-called “Mexico Sector.” Since prisoners unsuited for work, like Hanna, were typically sent directly to the gas chamber, Mengele often sent a physician and guard to remove subjects from lines, if they were considered appropriate for medical experimentation. Moshe was relieved that Hanna had not been selected for this torture.

After several more minutes of waiting, Mengele finally arrived. He sat down heavily in his chair and began to rifle through papers upon his desk. During this time, he completely ignored Moshe. Of course, Mengele had seen him.

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He was simply ignoring Moshe, in favor of something else more important. This continued for several more minutes. Finally, Mengele looked up at Moshe.

"You are Doctor, uh, let's see here." Mengele shuffled some papers again and found Moshe's name. Moshe thought this strange, since they had already met, not three days ago in this very office. "Oh yes, Dr. Silverman. You are from Austria, yes?" Moshe nodded his head. "Did you practice in Vienna, Silverman?" Moshe wanted nothing more than to wring this terrible creature's neck. He twisted his wedding ring unconsciously.

Moshe found it difficult to restrain his violent feelings toward Mengele. "No. I am from Salzburg."

Mengele stared at Moshe for a moment. "Oh, that's too bad. Vienna is such a wonderful city." Mengele flashed a broad smile at Moshe. "It's been a favorite of mine for many years." Mengele continued to smile at Moshe, perhaps recalling his experiences in Vienna. The room suddenly felt stifling to Moshe. There was no air to breathe. He was perspiring heavily. For the second time that day, he noticed tightness in his chest. Unconsciously, he dictated a diagnosis for his condition. *It is angina, probably due to stenosis of my coronary arteries, exacerbated by anxiety.* He felt the same tightness while he was walking back from Block 10. He also recalled that he had been out of breath at the time. *My coronary arteries are closing! Better to die of a coronary thrombosis than to assist these demons in their evil, demented work!*

Mengele spoke again. This time, there was no smile. He spoke in stern, measured tones. "In the first phase of our experiments, we will subject pairs of twins and people with physical handicaps to special medical examinations. It is essential that they be carried out on the living organism." Moshe made a mental note of Mengele's term "organism," instead of person. *Referring to his medical subjects as "organisms" must make it easier on his conscience!* Moshe was disgusted. "Usually painful and exhausting, these examinations will last for hours. Be prepared for a lot of work here, Silverman." Moshe could only imagine the horror this would be for starved, terrified children. He assumed that the majority of the twins would be children, since siblings move away from each other. "The subjects will be photographed, plaster casts will be made of their teeth and jaws, and their fingerprints and toe prints will be taken. This will be your responsibility, Silverman."

Moshe listened to Mengele with trepidation. He could examine people. He might even be able to perform some cursory "experiments" upon his fellow prisoners. But he could not torture or kill them. *I would gladly take my own life first.* Mengele stopped to blow his nose prodigiously into a handkerchief, before stuffing it back into his trousers. He continued, in a nasal tone. "As soon as the examinations of a given pair of twins or dwarfs are finished, you will kill the subjects by phenol injection. Before we may go on to the next phase of our experiments, the comparative analysis of internal organs must be accomplished at autopsy. Scientifically interesting anatomical specimens will be preserved and shipped to the Institute in Berlin-Dahlem for more detailed examination." Moshe began to wonder how he might damage the experiments.

The two doctors' eyes met for a long moment in silence. Mengele's eyes

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were dark and radiated hatred. Moshe's blue eyes were bright and sparkled with knowledge and life. Mengele frowned deeply and the moment was gone. "Dismissed," said Mengele, with a wave of his hand. Moshe slowly rose from his chair and walked out of Mengele's office.

There it was. Mengele spoke the words that Moshe feared most. He was to kill the poor victims after experimenting upon them. At least, thought Moshe, killing someone by injection is humane. But the thought of destroying young, innocent lives was impossible for Moshe. He again recalled a part of the Talmud that teaches one about killing. "To take a life is like killing the entire world." Then, Moshe remembered another line from the Talmud. "To save a life is like saving the entire world." Moshe wondered if it would be possible to save a life, here in this camp of death.

Then, he thought of Jacob and Rachael. *Where are they? Are they still alive?* Then, the darkest thought arrived. He looked upward and began to pray. *God, please take care of my beloved Hanna.* He asked God to tell her that he would soon join her in heaven. He then spoke aloud to God. "Should I kill myself now, before I am forced to harm others?" There was no answer. On the way back to the lab, Moshe's chest pain returned. This time, the pain was sharp and it radiated across the left side of his chest and his left arm. He paused, leaning on the wall for support. "It's better that I die here now than to harm innocent people. God, please let me die now." However, the pain finally abated and he walked slowly back to his lab, deep in thought.

Upon his return to the lab, Moshe found his friend, Dr. Goldman. He described his meeting with Mengele. "I don't see how I can do such things, Albert. I cannot deliberately harm innocent people. It's against the Hippocratic code of medicine and against the Talmud. What can I do?" Moshe was completely distraught.

Goldman put his hand on Moshe's arm. "My friend, all that we can do here, is to try to ease the pain. Even if we know that our compatriots will die here, we can try to minimize their pain. But, if you cannot do it... you can end your life. No one would blame you, Silverman." Moshe gave this some thought.

Goldman continued to tell Moshe about his experiences. "In October, I had to work with a Dr. Kremer. His name was Johan Paul Kremer. He said that he was a professor of medicine at the University of Munster, where he lectured on anatomy and human genetics." Goldman paused to collect himself. He was visibly moved, almost to tears. "My God, what they made me do, Silverman... it was atrocious. At the Block 28 clinic in the main camp, he carried out assessments of prisoners attempting to gain admission to the hospital. Many of them were at the point of exhaustion. He called them "in the 'Musselman state,' in the final stages of starvation to death. Kremer ordered me to kill them by phenol injection." Goldman's voice wavered and stopped. Moshe put his arm on Goldman's arm, comforting him. Goldman was now crying, covering his face in shame. His body jerked this way and that way, uncontrollably. Moshe sensed that Goldman's mind was near the breaking point. However, he assumed that it could only help to discuss it. He put his arm around his friend to comfort him. Finally, with the sobbing abated, Goldman continued. "Kremer selected prison-

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ers who struck him as particularly good experimental material, and questioned them just before their deaths, as they lay on the autopsy table awaiting injection. He asked them about such personal details as their weight before arrest and any medicines they had used recently. In some cases, he ordered these prisoners photographed. Before their bodies were cold, I was forced to autopsy them. I had to make slides for Kremer of the liver, spleen, and pancreas.”

Goldman continued to describe some of the things he had seen at Auschwitz. It seemed that he needed to talk, so Moshe simply listened. “Last year, Moshe, three doctors from I. G. Farben and Bayer came here. They brought many new types of medication. The medications had no names, only letters and numbers. They said that I had to help them carry out clinical trials. They gave the medications to prisoners who had contracted diseases. Then, they made me inject the prisoners with disease. Silverman, they forced me to give people cholera, tuberculosis and other diseases. Then, after I gave them horrible diseases, I had to do autopsies on them. They also asked me to kill the injected patients with phenol. I refused and told them that I would rather die. They beat me for a while. But I refused to kill them. So, they did the actual killing and forced me to do the autopsies.” The sobbing returned and Goldman was unable to continue.

Moshe knew where he could find some liquor. The Polish doctors hid it in a cabinet in the lab that was assigned to them and to Moshe. He pulled out a bottle of sherry and gave it to Goldman. After Goldman had gulped down some sherry, he returned the bottle to Jacob, who also drank some. The two Jewish doctors then sat in silence for a long time, each of them contemplating how to kill themselves.

After a while, Goldman began to talk again. Moshe was afraid of what he might hear next, but made no effort to stop him. “Just after I arrived here, in 1942, there was a Dr. August Hirt here, leading a group of researchers. The first thing that he told me was that he was interested in skeletons. I could not imagine why. But there were plenty of skeletons to be had here, even in '42. He said that he represented something called the “Ahnenerbe Foundation. Have you heard of it, Silverman?” Moshe thought for a moment and shook his head.

Goldman continued. “They selected over a hundred prisoners for study. The vast majority were Jewish men and women. There were a handful of Soviet POWs and a few Asians. A Dr. Bruno Berger, who arrived in Auschwitz in early '43, was responsible for the collection of personal data. After going through quarantine, some of the prisoners whom Berger selected were sent to another concentration camp, where they were to be killed in a gas chamber. According to Berger, the victims' corpses were sent to Hirt as material for his skeleton collection. Hirt intended to use the skeletons for anthropological studies that would demonstrate the superiority of the Nordic race. Silverman, they killed more than a hundred innocent people – just to prove that they are a superior race.”

Again, they sat in dejected silence. Fortunately, the sherry had begun to work. Moshe felt lightheaded. He was more relaxed. It was a good feeling, for a change. But Goldman was not quite done with his recounting. “There was a thoracic surgeon here last year named Cohen. I believe that he was from Mannheim. He told me that Mengele was following orders from Himmler to find

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a way to double the birthrate for Aryans. He said that our work would help the Aryan race conquer the world. Anyway, he was forced to experiment on about two hundred twins – adults and children. Mengele also forced Cohen to carry out a large number of experiments in the field of contagious diseases, to find out how human beings of different races withstood these diseases. Cohen was forced to infect them with typhus and tuberculosis. Mengele forced him to use Gypsy twins for this purpose. His experiments combined scientific research with the racist aims of the Nazis. About halfway through the experiments, Cohen killed himself. One day, just after roll call, he simply walked into the electrified fence.” Moshe was astonished. But he stored the information for future use. *Electrocution would be a quick death.*

Chapter 45

The Winds Of Change

Weeks had passed since Rachael had left little Anton with Freda and Sol. Now, cold winter winds whipped up the farm soil, flinging it against the windows of their house. Sol had just come in with an armload of firewood. A burst of snow and frigid air came in with him. Freda was knitting a tiny white sweater in her chair near the fireplace. Near the large hearth, baby Anton Silverman cooed and flayed his arms about. He seemed fascinated with his hands, as he alternately flexed and then straightened them. He made shapes with his tiny fingers, and then delighted in making new ones. Freda and Sol were amazed at how little Anton mimicked them. He was a bright child. Although he was only a few months old, he rarely cried. Sol slumped into his chair near the fire and picked up a book. The firewood popped and snapped.

Suddenly, there was a loud knocking upon the door. Sol crossed the room and opened the door, expecting to see one of their neighbors. His friendly smile drooped upon seeing a group of black-clad Nazis. The man in front flung the door open and the rest immediately entered the room and surrounded Freda and Sol. Freda recognized the man who stepped to the front.

"I am Obersturmbanfuhrer Johan Mettler. You may recall that we met in the Krakow General Hospital several weeks ago." Mettler glanced around the room, stopping when he saw little Anton. Sol counted six SS soldiers, along with Mettler and another Gestapo officer. He thought about his shotgun, which was perched against the frame of a side door. He then realized that it would be impossible to defend them against the Nazis. Each of the SS soldiers carried a machine gun. The officers carried pistols. He and Freda would be dead before he could reload the old shotgun. His heart began to pound. Freda saw the fear in his face and began to cry. "I will see your papers now," insisted Mettler. Sol walked over to a table and began to pull the drawer open. Instantly, each of the German soldiers pulled their machine guns up and aimed at Sol. Freda gasped aloud. When they saw Sol remove some papers, they put their guns down. Sol gave Mettler the papers.

Mettler walked over to baby Anton, who continued to coo loudly, unaware of the immediate danger. "What have we here," asked Mettler? "Where is the child's mother?" In the silence that followed, Mettler pulled a small notebook from the side pocket of his shiny long black overcoat. "That would be someone named, *Helga*." He pronounced the name Helga in a sarcastic voice. Freda and Sol looked at each other in silence.

Mettler continued. His voice was initially soft, but was now growing increasingly stern with each word. "Of course," he continued, "that's not her real name, is it? In fact," he said glancing at the identification papers in his hand, "these are not your real names, are they?" Tears now streamed down Freda's

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face. She glanced at Sol, who was suddenly grasping at his chest and breathing heavily. Neither of them spoke to Mettler.

Tired of playing games, Mettler took off his gloves and sat next to the fire. With his back to Freda and Sol, he said in a very terse voice, "You will now tell me your real names, as well as where I may find this person who calls herself 'Helga.'"

Freda and Sol glanced at each other, but said nothing. The fire popped and crackled. Freda spoke softly. "Sol, are you all right?" Before he could respond, Sol saw Mettler raise his right hand with the index finger pointed up. Suddenly, the soldier closest to Freda swung the butt of his machine gun up and then slammed it into Freda's abdomen. She doubled over in pain. Moaning, she fell to the floor. Looking up at Sol, she gasped, "Tell them nothing!" Mettler raised his hand again and the soldier slammed his gun into Freda's back. She fell back to the floor, groaning in pain.

Mettler turned his chair around so that he could face Freda and Sol. Sol noticed that Mettler had a sadistic smile. He waited until Freda could stand up again. "Again," he said tersely, "Who are you and where may I find the woman you took from the hospital?" Freda and Sol remained silent. Mettler exploded, "We know that you are Jews!" This time, he raised his left hand and pointed at Sol. Suddenly, the soldier closest to Sol slammed his machine gun into Sol's abdomen. Sol doubled over in pain.

"No!" screamed Freda. "Leave the poor man alone. We're not Jews. I tell you, we're not Jews! If you want to hit someone, then hit me!"

Mettler seemed amused, his smile broadening. "So, you say that you are not Jews, eh? Well, let's just find out. He looked at the soldiers near Sol and said, "Remove his trousers." As the soldiers stripped Sol, Mettler began to play with the baby. When he looked up again, Sol was naked from the waist down. Freda had a horrified look upon her face, while the soldiers were snickering. "It seems, Jewess, that your husband has been circumcised. Now, why would a Christian man be circumcised?"

Sol grasped his chest again and moaned. His skin color had turned from pink to gray. "Sol!" screamed Freda. But the soldier next to her again slammed his machine gun into her back. She screamed in pain. Sol looked up but could do nothing. His chest felt like someone was sitting on it. The pressure was intense. He knew that he was having a heart attack. But saving Freda and the baby was of greatest importance.

"Don't hurt her," Sol screamed at Mettler. "Please, don't hurt her."

Mettler raised his right arm and this time raised two fingers. Suddenly the soldier nearest to Freda hit her face as hard as possible, breaking her nose. A torrent of blood began to flow down her face. When he let go, her head bobbed for moment before falling to her chest. Her long gray hair fell down and became matted with blood. Following a brief silence, Mettler spoke. "We know that a member of the partisans was here in September. His name is Anton Chrusciel. We believe that he was traveling with your young woman – the mother of this child. We are certain that he was responsible for killing several German soldiers at a checkpoint near the border. If you tell us what we want to know, we will

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spare your lives.”

The room was suddenly silent. The fireplace continued to sputter and crackle. Then, in a deep moaning voice that Sol had never heard from his wife, Freda said, “Tell them nothing Sol. They will kill us anyway.” The last sentence was almost a gargle, as Freda spit out a huge volume of blood. Sol’s heart was broken as he looked at Freda. Her nose was twisted sideways giving her the appearance of an aged boxer. An intense wave of pain in his chest made him moan again.

“All right Freda. I won’t say anything.”

Suddenly Mettler stood up. For a moment, Sol thought that he was looking at a different person. Rather than the urbane, sophisticated gentleman he was a moment earlier, he was suddenly a fearsome, horrifying beast. His face had turned from pink to red and his eyes literally bulged out from their sockets. His demeanor was wild and terrifying. Spittle flew from his grimacing mouth as he screamed at them. “You Jews are scum,” he raged at them. “You don’t deserve to be squeezed to death underneath the boots of an Aryan! You are vile and a disease upon all good people! Well, you will cheat and subvert us no longer!” He paused briefly, as much to bring air back into his lungs as to think of other ways he might denigrate Jews. Sol quickly observed the other German soldiers in the room. Each of them angrily pointed their guns at him and Freda. Their superior officer had just turned into a malevolent creature and they were but a step or two behind. Mettler had become a formidable monster. Sol sensed that the end was near.

Then, suddenly the pause was over and, like a hurricane the raging returned. Mettler slowly unstrapped his pistol from the gun belt and lifted it up. It was a standard issue black Luger. He began ranting again, but this time directly at Sol.

“I’ve just had it with your people. You have no right to live among us. You infect us, you know. That’s why we have a final solution to exterminate you. Not just you, mind you, but all of your people. Yes, the world will soon be saved from the Jewish disease and all other countries will thank Germany for doing it.” He suddenly changed. Just as quickly as he had changed into a wild raving lunatic, he turned back into a gentleman again. But he was still dangerous.

Sol watched as Mettler turned off the safety and cocked the trigger mechanism of his gun. It made an audible *snap*. Sol’s body involuntarily jerked from the sound. His chest was bursting with pressure. The pain was horribly intense. He watched as Mettler brought the gun up to Freda’s head. “No!” Sol gasped. “Don’t... do...” Sol no longer had enough air in his lungs to say more than one word. The pain in his chest was unbearable. He had never experienced pain this intense before. He tried to scream, but could only manage something that sounded like, “Uhooo.” Suddenly, there was an enormous flare of light, followed closely by a thunderous boom. Freda’s head flew backwards and the curtains behind the sofa were instantly filled with blood, brains and pieces of bone. And, the baby immediately began wailing.

Sol began to retch. His mind played the scene repeatedly, attempting to digest the tragedy. Overwhelming emotions inundated poor Sol. He felt an-

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guish, heartbreak, suffering and pain. It was as though the fabric of his soul had just been stripped away. He had never felt so alone and afraid. And yet he felt much anger. Sol summoned as much energy as possible and lurched at Mettler. But the soldiers grabbed him and pulled him back before he could reach the crazed killer. The best he could manage was to dribble saliva upon Mettler's shoes.

Mettler looked down at Sol with contempt. Then he suddenly looked up, as though he had just produced a new idea. He smiled surreptitiously and walked towards the fireplace. He suddenly turned left and picked up little Anton by one leg. He held the crying child upside down and began to walk randomly throughout the room. His mindless raving continued. "The only way to rid ourselves of your infestation is to exterminate all of you. That means we've got to kill the children. Of course, they're not really humans, so it's perfectly appropriate to kill them." Mettler was lecturing to his men, holding the bawling baby by a leg.

Sol could hardly believe what he was hearing. He glanced at the German guards again. They had the same mindless expressions as before. He saw two of the guards smiling. The others looked down.

By now, poor little Anton was wailing loudly. For a brief moment, Mettler picked the child up and looked at the baby's face. For the first time, Mettler saw that little Anton had blonde hair and blue eyes. No one could mistake those big bright blue eyes for anything but Aryan. Sol was briefly amused at the confusion upon Mettler's face. How can such an obviously Aryan child come from a Jewish mother? But the look of confusion was soon overwhelmed by an evil smirk. "Don't be concerned about the child's appearance," exclaimed Mettler. "These Jews are clever. They have found a way to make their children appear Aryan. But, I can tell you that this bastard's mother is a Jewess. I was there in the hospital. And she was here not long ago. And now she's joined the partisans again.

Suddenly, Mettler wheeled around and faced Sol. The rage in Mettler's face was overwhelming. His eyes were wide and bulging. He had a fearsome grimace and a snarling mouth. He held little Anton upside down, grasping one of his tiny legs with his right hand. "TELL ME WHERE THEY ARE!" bellowed Mettler. Even his soldiers jumped back at that outburst. It was so loud that there was an echo in the small room. TELL ME WHERE THEY ARE NOW!"

Sol's hearing and vision were failing. He was dizzy that he had ever been. His head felt like it was ready to come off and float. His drastically weakened and damaged heart was now undulating, more than beating. As his blood pressure fell, oxygen-starved organs began to fail. The world darkened. The tremendous weight upon his chest was overwhelming. The pain was hideous. Sol felt like his lungs were drowning and he could process only a little air. He tried to talk. But it was useless. He could still hear Mettler's raving lunacy. "TELL ME WHERE THEY ARE!" To Sol, it was like listening to someone at the far end of a very long tunnel. The words were hollow, barely legible.

Sol was no longer able to whisper. As the world continued to fade away into grayness, he saw Mettler swing little Anton around from his heel, as though he were made of cloth. The chest pain was fading away now. But the tremendous

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pressure upon his chest remained. He was very lightheaded. All of the objects in the room seemed to float into and out of his dark, narrow field of vision. He was cold. In the instant before his vision disappeared, Sol saw Mettler swing little Anton with all of his might, holding onto the child's tiny ankle and foot – until he smashed the baby's skull into the living room wall. Sol saw baby Anton's skull split apart against the living room wall. Chunks of skull and brains clung to the white wall, while blood dripped down forming bright red lines. Then, all was darkness and silence. Sol was dead.

Chapter 46

Rachael And The Partisans

Miles away, in the Lipiczanka Forest of Poland, Rachael Silverman leaned against the thick base of an old oak tree. She slung the heavy rifle off of her shoulder and placed it gently upon the ground. Her left shoulder was aching fiercely after carrying the rifle on an all-day march through the forest. Rachael was with a group of ten partisans. They had spent New Year's Eve freezing, crowded into a one-room cabin in a dark, dense Polish forest.

Rachael's heart ached for Jacob. She thought about him constantly. And, surprisingly, her heart ached for little Anton. Sinking down against the hard tree bark and still panting, Rachael was ashamed when she thought about how she had hated the baby for his father's brutal acts. She wondered how she could have grown to love the little child so much. Now, she could hardly wait to return to him. The baby tugged at her heart. She gave no serious thought to the possibility that Freda and Sol might have been caught. Now, thinking about little Anton made her smile. But she had a mission with the partisans and it would be dangerous. It was now 1944 and the Nazis had killed so many innocent people. She had to argue for a very long time with Anton in order to get his permission to go to Auschwitz. In the end, he admitted that it was his mistake for telling her that Jacob had been moved there. So, she found herself out of breath in the freezing Polish countryside, with Anton by her side.

Their mission was to obtain as much information as possible about the camp that the Germans now called "Auschwitz." This information would be passed along to the Allied powers, so that they could destroy the camp. Rachael was a loyal partisan. But, she also had her own agenda. She wanted more than anything to help Jacob and his parents escape. And now, she realized that the escape had to occur before the Allies could bomb the camp. The new sense of urgency occupied her thoughts as Anton Chrusciel slumped down next to her.

Rachael looked down at Chrusciel and smiled. Looking at him always made her think about her own little Anton. *What is my baby doing now?* The pull of love brought her back to him. She imagined him cooing and imitating words with Freda's face just above. The thought made her smile. Chrusciel's voice interrupted her pleasant daydream. "What are you thinking about? Rachael looked at him with satisfaction. "I was just thinking about little Anton. I was wondering what he's doing right now." Suddenly, her smile disappeared. "Anton, do you think he's safe?"

Chrusciel saw her despair and wondered how much of the truth he should tell her. "I won't lie to you Rachael. All of Europe is a very dangerous place for a Jew. The Levin's have false identity papers. They are good copies. But not perfect. And I'm worried about the Gestapo officer that came to the hospital. If he's serious about his job, and if he's good at it, he can discover our secret." He

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saw that Rachael's eyes were filling with tears and moved to her side.

"Oh God," cried Rachael. "I love him so much." Tears were now streaming down Rachael's face. "I never thought that I would, but I do love him. You know that, don't you Anton?" He felt as though she was asking for some sort of absolution.

Placing his arm around her shoulders, Anton continued. "But they do have a chance, Rachael. So, since there is nothing we can do about it, why don't we just believe that they are safe?"

But Rachael's mind was uneasy. She could not shake the feeling that something was wrong. "I'm worried Anton," she whispered. "I think that something bad has happened." Tears continued to spill from her eyes, forming clean vertical streaks in the dirt caked upon her face. The long dusty trek had left its mark on all of their faces. New tears washed additional dirt from their paths, forming lines of brighter skin on her cheeks. "I can't explain it, Anton. But I just know that something's wrong."

Chrusciel considered this for a moment. It was probably just a mother's worry, he thought. "All right," he said softly. "After we're done here, we'll stop by the farmhouse on our way back."

Rachael smiled as Chrusciel wiped the tears from her face with his hand. "That's good," she replied. "Thanks."

For the third straight night, the partisans slept in the woods. Rachael was constantly cold and hungry. She had lost a great deal of weight since delivering little Anton. In fact, she had never been this thin. But the thought of Jacob starving inside the camp prevented her from complaining. Chrusciel had many new members of his partisans. Leon and Hershel were the only men that she recognized. There were two new females in this group. One was named Misha. She was tall and thin, with long silky black hair. Rachael thought that she could not be older than eighteen. Misha was very quiet. Perhaps this was one of her first missions. Rachael noticed how most of the men in the group gazed at her and tried to help her with everything. She was the center of attention and Chrusciel did not like it. She was becoming a distraction and distracted men made mistakes. Still, in a sense, Rachael was grateful that she was not the only female in the group.

The other woman was Vera. Vera was about thirty years old. She had short light brown hair, a pudgy face, and she almost never smiled. Unlike the shapely Misha, Vera had the overall shape of a pear. And, unlike Misha, the men mostly left her alone. Rachael thought that Vera was very angry about something. But Vera was difficult to understand. She was always quiet. And while she was an obedient member of the team, Rachael had reservations about why she was with them. She thought that perhaps Vera was hiding something. Still, in her position, she had to trust Vera.

There had been no snow for a long time and the ground was hard and bumpy. Rachael found that she could sleep only for brief periods before the ground forced her to change positions. It was mid-January and although the days were sunny, the nights were terribly cold. And she was always hungry. Chrusciel had told the partisans to never make a campfire on missions. The smoke could be

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seen for many miles. So, they were limited in what they could eat. After days of sardines, old moldy cheese and hard, stale bread, Rachael was dreaming of food. But in her waking moments, she reminded herself that she was probably eating like royalty, compared to Jacob and his parents. She remembered the constant gnawing hunger from Theresienstadt. It was probably worse for Jacob in this new camp, called Auschwitz. So, for the third night in a row, Rachael slept only fitfully.

Near morning, Rachael stood up and stretched. She decided that since she could not sleep, she might as well watch the sun rise. But she was surprised to see Chrusciel sitting upright against a tree. She walked over and sat next to him. For a few minutes neither of them spoke. Such long silences with Anton no longer made her feel uncomfortable. They were friends now. The wind had disappeared and, for the time being, the world was silent. She could see Anton's breath in the cold air of the early morning. Somehow, to Rachael, it seemed as though the world had stopped. Finally, Chrusciel spoke. "Little Anton is a beautiful child. I'm glad you named him after me. I'm also glad that I had a chance to play with him." He turned his head so that he could look directly into Rachael's eyes. "You are a wonderful mother, Rachael." She smiled and looked down. "But there's something that I have wanted to ask you," he continued in a soft, low voice.

Here it comes. He's going to ask, "Who is the father of my baby?" Her muscles tensed and flexed. The anxiety that she felt every time she thought about being raped had returned. It was unrelenting and terrible to think about. She had told no one about the rape, except for Moshe. Strangely, she felt more comfortable talking with Moshe that she had felt with her own father. In a way, she felt the same here with Anton. She knew that she could trust him. But it was still difficult to talk about.

Chrusciel was still looking at Rachael's eyes. Finally, he whispered, "Rachael, the child does not look much like you or Jacob." He stopped, waiting for Rachael. She drew in a deep breath. Looking down, she saw that her hands were trembling. Quickly, she hid them under her legs. Chrusciel quickly grasped her arms and pulled her freezing, trembling hands into his own warm, soft hands. "Rachael," whispered Chrusciel. "You know that you can trust me."

Rachael looked back up and saw the love in Chrusciel's eyes. "Yes Anton. I know that I can trust you. But, I've not spoken about this with anyone, except Moshe. It's difficult."

Rachael could hold the tears no longer. She cursed herself for being so weak. Chrusciel put his arm around her shoulder. Rachael smiled. "You are my best friend Anton. I suppose that I can tell you."

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "And you are my best friend Rachael." Looking into his eyes, Rachael understood that she was much more than a friend to Anton. She deeply loved Jacob. They were "soul mates," she had once said. But she was also tied to this man, this *goy*, her father would have said. Within the Jewish community of Salzburg, having any relationship with a non-Jewish man was akin to committing a serious crime. Yet, Anton's love for her had saved her life. She could tell him things that she suspected would always

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remain dark hidden islands in the ocean of her heart. She loved Jacob dearly, yet exploring her relationship with Anton made her nervous. *Is it truly just a platonic relationship for me?*

Rachael took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The wind had subsided and her breath drifted about like smoke before the air absorbed it. She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it twice, before she was ready. Her eyes were wide with fear and a muscle in her face twitched briefly. "I was raped by the commandant at Theresienstadt." Rachael managed to croak out the words in a hoarse voice, as though the very repetition of them fouled her mouth. A solitary tear streaked slowly down from her left eye. She wiped it away with a furious gesture. *Where is my strength?* "It happened just a few weeks after Jacob and I were married. He was not brutal and he did not hurt me much physically. But when he was on top... on top of me, I felt so much anger." Rachael was on the verge of another crying fit. She sensed this, but had no way around it. *I must continue.* "Finally, I closed my eyes and pretended that he was Jacob. I had to breathe through my mouth, so I would not smell his stink. And I pretended that Jacob was making love with me." She paused again to regain her composure. "And when he was done, he had me quickly returned to my barracks. He seemed ashamed that they guards saw me with him in that way. Morality was somehow missing in that man." Rachael slumped to the ground, crying. "Of course, everyone can tell that I have little to do with that child. Do I have blonde hair? Do I have blue eyes?" She was agitated again. "Does Jacob?" *I cannot become hysterical.* With great effort, she calmed herself and continued. "Of course, Anton, everyone can see that Jacob is not his father."

Anton put his arm around Rachael's shoulder. She pulled back at first. But, her anxiety was too strong. *Oh, Jacob, where are you? I need you to hold me right now!* Rachael surrendered to her emotions and fell into Anton's arms, crying. She trembled and sobbed heavily for several minutes. Anton said nothing, but held her tightly as she trembled. He occasionally patted her head while she was sobbing. "It's OK Rachael," he repeated softly. "It's all right, Rachael. Don't worry." He continued to comfort Rachael. Then he whispered, "We'll find someone to adopt him."

Rachael suddenly pulled back and looked up into Anton's face with wide eyes. Tears brimmed over the edges of her eyes. She grasped the front of his coat swiftly with both hands and screamed at him. "No! You don't understand. I love him! I love that child! And I never want to be away from him again!" Rachael collapsed in tears into Anton's waiting arms. This time, she cried for several minutes. Finally, she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning, Chrusciel called the small group of partisans together for a meeting. Again, it was freezing. The nearby pond that they had used for water now was covered with ice. They had to use their rifles to make holes in the ice for drinking water. Everyone was hungry. They stood at attention in the stillness of the frigid morning, their breath wafting out of their nostrils and disappearing above their heads. Rachael tried to recall the last time that she felt warm and failed. She stood at attention and shivered while thinking about Jacob. *Where is my beloved? When will I see him?* Chrusciel walked out of the nearby forest

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and stood in front of his troops. When he had their full attention, he spoke to them in quiet, firm tones. “All right group. Today is Tuesday. This is the day we have been awaiting. We planned this more than a week ago. Now, it is time to begin. Each of us will have a responsibility during the next two days. After that, we will meet here again, on Thursday morning. Now, for one last time, let’s review our jobs.” The team drew together one last time to rehearse their individual tasks. The sense of fear was palpable as eyes darted to and from each other. Yet, this time the group was quiet. Their typical swagger and bravado was gone. There were not even obligatory words of encouragement. This time, they would be going deep into enemy territory. There was a good chance that some of them might not survive this mission. Rachael was petrified.

“To begin this,” said Chrusciel, “I have assigned myself two major tasks. First, I will position myself near the main railroad station. I will observe and record all traffic in and out of the camp. If possible, I will try to observe how many prisoners are discharged into the camp. I will also try to determine how many reside there or are removed from the camp. Second, I will observe the nearby factories. I will try to determine how many prisoners are forced to work in the factories, what the factories are producing, and if possible – where the products are being sent.” The partisans stared at Anton in admiration. Those tasks were overwhelming. He would be a very busy man.

Then, Chrusciel looked sharply at Hershel. “Next group,” he said. Hershel and Leon were the only partisans that Rachael remembered from the original group. Hershel spoke in a low, rather dramatic voice. “I will take Yanni, Gregory, Erich, Leon, Rudy and Walter. We will split up and surround the camp. Each of us will draw a map of our area, to include every detail. We will examine fences, guard towers, entrances and exits, traffic patterns, buildings and all activity. We will do this from positions that offer complete protection from the Germans and rejoin the group here, Thursday morning.”

“Very good,” offered Chrusciel with a smile, wink and a more cheerful voice. He rarely complimented his partisans. So, little things like a smile or nod of his head were well taken. “Next,” said Chrusciel in a more severe tone. He looked at Vera, then at Rachael.

Rachael spoke first. “I will take Vera and Misha into the town. We will pretend to be students traveling through Poland on a holiday. However, we will interview as many residents from town as possible. We will ask them if they know what happens in the camp. It is likely that some of them work in the camp. Without drawing suspicion, we will determine how many prisoners live in the camp, where they work, how they live and – most importantly – how these people get in and out of the camp.”

Chrusciel smiled briefly. “And you will meet us back here on Thursday morning?” The three women nodded their heads. Suddenly, Chrusciel looked at Rachael. He seemed lost in thought for a moment. “Rachael, you will not enter the camp unless you feel certain about getting back out. Under no circumstances are you to risk being caught as a spy. Then, you may both be lost to us.” Rachael listened without comment. But deep inside, she knew that she had to go inside of Auschwitz. She had to bring Jacob out.

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Chrusciel stood up. Immediately, everyone else stood up. "Join hands," said Chrusciel. In a moment, everyone was holding hands. They formed a circle under the towering trees of the forest. There was a steady wind. Far above, crows called out to each other in a raucous conversation. The sky was steel gray. The wind rustled tree branches nearby. Everyone stopped to look. Some of the taller trees made crunching sounds as their heavy branches bent in the wind. Then Anton spoke in a low voice. "It is imperative that none of you are caught by the Germans. If they know that one of you are spying on them, they will assume that there are others and we'll all be prisoners or dead. Do you understand that?" Anton repeated this and looked each person in the eyes before moving on.

"Partisans," continued Chrusciel in a stern tone. "We are here for reconnaissance and no more. No matter what you see, hear or feel... you will not fire a weapon or attack anyone. Is that understood?" Everyone nodded in agreement. He continued, "We all know what's happening at this terrible place. They are killing and burning innocent people down there!" Chrusciel pointed down, in the direction of the camp. "Our mission is to gather reliable information for the Allies. If we can convince them about the Nazi horrors here, they can bomb it and make the killing stop." Gazing into the eyes of each partisan, Chrusciel tried to make certain that each one was sincere. They were. Or so it seemed.

Then, Anton stared directly at Rachael. "No matter what you may see or hear – you will take no action. Is that clear?" He was almost shouting at Rachael. He had never addressed her in such tones before. She realized that she was a soldier in the partisan army. No matter how much he loved her, she was a soldier and she had to obey commands. Rachael realized why Anton meant what he said. Even if she somehow saw Jacob or his parents, she could do nothing. It would be the most difficult thing that anyone could do. "Rachael," he glared into her eyes. "Is that clear?"

She nodded her head and replied sternly, "Yes sir!"

"All right partisans, said Chrusciel. You are all professionals now. You have your orders. I am very tempted to take your firearms away from you right now. You must understand that firing your gun will attract attention – the wrong kind of attention. Most likely, if you fire your weapon, you will be killed or taken prisoner. I have reluctantly decided to allow you to keep them. But remember this... the safety must be on at all times. If you drop your gun and the safety is off, it may discharge. Use it only as a last resort and if your life is threatened. If you must kill someone, use your knife. This is critical. Next, if you are being followed, do not come back here. You will compromise the entire group. Go somewhere else and we'll meet later. Finally, remember that we need this information badly. It's far more important than killing Germans here. Be professionals. Are there any questions?" The group remained silent. Chrusciel continued, "We meet back here in 48 hours. Let's go!"

The partisans then moved off in different directions. Rachael heard Leon say to Hershel, "I hope we can find this place again." The men laughed. She watched as Anton moved off on his own, crunching pinecones under his boots. She was not in love with him, but she felt a tremendous admiration for him. Looking at Misha and Vera, she sighed and said, "Let's get going."

Rachael And The Partisans

Rachael, Misha and Vera entered the town of Oswiecim on the late afternoon of January 23rd. Rachael wondered in an offhand manner if any observers might question why three young women had entered their town on foot. It had taken their small group of partisans ten days to hike the distance between Krakow and Oswiecim. But few people traveled by foot these days. She briefly hoped that they were not observed and dismissed the thought. Unfortunately, a deranged adolescent named Gregor Kamski observed their arrival. Gregor was an eighteen-year-old misfit who escaped military service due to a polio infection as a child. Throughout his miserable eighteen years, Gregor had been oppressed, dominated, marginalized and deprecated by everyone. His own mother and sisters made him feel like a second-class individual. He had no close friends and no trade. Thus, Gregor wandered throughout the town on a regular basis, searching for his destiny. On this day, his destiny came to him.

While walking into the town, Rachael noticed a thin, dark figure observing them. This small person would duck into alleys or shops whenever he thought he had been seen. Rachael thought that this was probably the worst attempt at physical deception possible. Then Misha spoke. "Did you see that?" Vera replied while struggling with her suitcase.

"You mean the guy watching us?" "Yes," whispered Rachael.

"Some guy is trying to spy on us." Misha interrupted. "But he's terrible at it!" The three young women laughed.

After a long silence, Misha looked at Rachael and whispered, "So, Rachael. What, exactly, is our cover here?"

Rachael smiled briefly and replied, "You heard Anton. We are supposed to be tourists." Misha glanced at Vera, who smiled back.

Misha continued, "Do you think people are going to believe that? I mean, who goes on vacation to a war zone?" They all laughed.

Finally, Rachael broke the silence. "I would never tell another woman to do this, but..."

Both Vera and Misha looked at Rachael with suspense. "Well," continued Rachael. "You know what women do best. And, it's the best way to get what we want from the Germans – information." Vera smiled at the thought. But Misha, who was only eighteen, seemed reticent. Her lips formed a tiny horizontal line and she squinted her eyes, as though bothered by something. Rachael realized that she was uncomfortable with the thought of trading sex for information. Looking directly at Misha, she said, "But of course none of us should do anything that we don't feel comfortable with, from a moral standpoint." Misha's face turned bright red as they continued again in silence. Vera walked on with a sly smile.

Finally Vera spoke. "I'm not afraid of having sex with a German, if it will help us. I hate them. They took my only brother away and sent him to some camp in Germany. They said he was a homosexual. That was two years ago. We haven't heard from him since then." She looked demurely at the ground. "It's just that I haven't done anything like that before."

All three women stopped and rested upon a bench inside a railroad switching station. It was a tiny, cold room. But, it kept the frigid wind out. Despite the cold wind, they were perspiring. Rachael and Misha stared at Vera. After some

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time, Rachael spoke. "Misha, are you a virgin?" Vera glanced at Rachael and turned her face down. After another long period of silence, Rachael put her arm around Misha. "Don't worry little one. We won't ask you to do anything you might feel bad about. All right?" Misha looked up and smiled with relief as Rachael gave her a hug.

"Thanks," replied Misha, just short of tears.

Suddenly, the ground seemed to vibrate. The women looked at each other. A loud bang was heard, coming from the east. As the women gazed into the distance, a puff of dark smoke rose over the tree line to the east. "That's inside the camp!" exclaimed Rachael. Within seconds, a siren wailed out its lonely high-pitched whine. Soon the popping sound of gunshots could be heard from the camp. "I'm going to see," cried Misha, as she rushed to the door. Just before she reached the door handle, Rachael dove and pulled her down from behind. They tumbled to the floor in unison.

"No," said Rachael in her strongest tone. "We are students," Rachael whispered into Misha's ear. "We are undercover and I intend that we remain that way. Misha, we'll find out what happened. But rushing to the scene would only paint us as partisan operatives." Rachael let go of Misha, discovering that she had created a welt upon Misha's arm. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

The three young women entered the Legionow Hotel just before sunset. Rachael registered under a new assumed name. Chills went up her spine as she realized that she was only about seven kilometers from her beloved Jacob. Being so close to him was like having an itch that could not be scratched, she observed. Her heart was pounding with the thought of Jacob being so close.

The hotel clerk, an obese man smoking a large curling pipe, closely observed Rachael as she registered under the name of Anna Krieger. Turning the book around, he snarled at Rachael. "You have not filled in your home address!" He blew foul smelling smoke in her face. Rachael had not thought about it. Urgently, she made up an address and wrote it down. It was 149 Westenplatte, Krakow, #3. She prayed that no one would ask her detailed questions about Krakow – for she had no answers. The clerk gave her a scowl and took the registry back under a cloud of smoke from his pipe. He looked behind Rachael and gave Vera and Misha the once-over.

"We'll need a room with twin beds," Rachael spoke as sternly as she could muster. The clerk walked into the back room, saying nothing.

Rachael's mind was spinning. She was not used to lying on the run. Her need for constant deception created quite an adrenaline rush. She found the feeling intriguing as well as alarming. *Is he phoning the Gestapo? Does he know that we are partisans? Are we about to be taken into custody?* She quickly wiped the perspiration from her forehead and face. Heart pounding, Rachael stood stiffly at the counter and waited. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the chubby old clerk returned, carrying a key on a large key ring bearing the name of the hotel in large type; "LEGIONOW." He made a point of looking longingly at Misha and Vera before handing the key to Rachael. "Room 212," he said in his most sinister voice. Rachael grabbed the key with relief and started to walk to the steps, Vera and Misha in tow.

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Suddenly, someone from behind said, “Miss Krieger,” in a deep, dark tone. But, Rachael’s mind was a million miles away. She failed to respond to her false name – the kind of mistake that can get one killed. Continuing up the steps, she again heard someone say, “Miss Krieger.” Only this time it was said in a more loud and impatient voice. Only after someone said, “Miss Krieger” for the third time did she recall using that name in the registry. *I’ve slipped! Oh, my God. I’ve slipped!* In her rush to get Misha and Vera into their room, she had forgotten to keep her new name in her thoughts. Rachael stopped in mid step and froze. She had just broken a cardinal rule of espionage. Worse yet, Rachael was almost certain that the voice was not that of the fat hotel clerk.

Rachael’s heart was pounding in her chest. She stood upon the third step. Vera and Misha were behind her. All three of them now resembled wax figurines, hanging onto the large wooden railing for dear life. Finally, with great trepidation, Rachael turned and looked back at the registration desk. The fat clerk smiled up at her, still puffing away on his pipe. But behind the clerk was a figure that Rachael recognized all too clearly. It was a Gestapo officer. Clad in his shiny black uniform, this man inspired fear with only his appearance. He was very tall, with high cheekbones and deep-set eyes. He was puffing on a thick, foul-smelling cigar. Removing his SS hat, he looked up at Rachael and said, for the fourth time, “Miss Krieger?” Rachael moved back down the steps and slowly returned to the desk. Her legs were shaking. Her hands were trembling. And her face was covered with perspiration.

“Yes,” she replied in a voice that quivered slightly. “You are from Krakow, Yes?” Here it comes, Rachael thought. He’s going to ask me some question about the city and I won’t have the answer.

Rachael quickly used the back of her hand to wipe perspiration from her face. “Yes, I am from Krakow,” replied Rachael, switching from Polish to German. She prayed that her use of the German language would not accidentally revert to Yiddish.

The officer continued to speak, now with a slight smile. “Have you been to the History Museum there?” He searched her face for any sign of nervous response. “No,” replied Rachael with a slight smile. “I haven’t lived there long. I haven’t had time to visit the museum yet.”

The officer, still staring deep into Rachael’s eyes, said, “Oh, that’s too bad. I was there only a month ago. There are many famous paintings there. You really must take the time to visit, when you return.”

The steely gray eyes of this Gestapo officer told Rachael that he was above her. His very posture insinuated his supremacy over her. Rachael summoned all of the courage that she could muster in order to continue. “Well then, I must plan a visit when I return,” she replied in a shaky, husky voice. She tried to smile at the end of her reply, but felt insecure about the result. Rachael then turned to leave. She took two steps and was about to place her right foot upon the first stair step, when she heard the Gestapo officer speak again. “Miss Krieger.” She froze. *Dear God, is this the end? I do not wish to die like this!* Turning around again to speak to this fearsome man was one of the most difficult things that she had to do. Still, she had her assignment. Forcing herself to turn and look at the

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man, she was surprised to see a broad smile on his face. Was he about to arrest her? *Why is he smiling?*

This time, the officer walked from behind the desk to the stairs and met Rachael. "I have been rude and I apologize. My name is also Krieger. I am Hans Krieger. May I ask where you live?" Rachael's mind was spinning. Was it true? Or, was this man fishing for something? She had to reply quickly to protect her subterfuge. But if she named his home city, and she was unable to relay information about it, she would be arrested.

"I'm originally from Hamburg," Rachael said in a shaky voice. She prayed that this Krieger would let her go and at the same time cursed herself for using a common name.

Still gazing directly into her eyes, Herr Krieger replied, "Oh, such a shame. I'm from Dusseldorf." Rachael sighed audibly in relief. She realized this quickly and hoped that the Gestapo officer did not notice it. *But, he is a professional. He will notice each and every sigh, the look of my eyes and the context of my words. I have not been trained well enough to defeat this one. I must be careful with every movement.*

Again, Rachael had to wipe perspiration from her brow quickly. She had become dizzy and light-headed. Her heart was pounding so hard that she was concerned she might faint. Then, slowly, little-by-little, Rachael collected herself. She straightened her posture and looked directly into Krieger's eyes. "I'm sorry, Herr Krieger, but I am aware of no relatives in Dusseldorf." She gave Vera and Mish a quick glance and saw them turn to go up the steps. She quickly turned back to Krieger, offering him her most stern expression. "Herr Krieger," she said in her steadiest voice, "My friends and I are tired from our trip. Perhaps I will see you again soon." She did her best to offer an apologetic smile. Inside, she prayed to never see him again.

"Of course," replied Krieger, doffing his cap as he turned to leave. Walking back to the lobby, he spoke in clear Yiddish. "Gut Shabbos," he said in a cheerful tone. Rachael was taken aback at hearing Yiddish from the mouth of this horrible creature. She instantly recognized it as a trick. *Anton has prepared me for this trick!* She recalled the many times that they practiced being interrogated together. Rachael turned and looked back at Krieger. "Did you say something?" Rachael asked this in such an offhand manner that Krieger immediately gave up the ruse. "Nothing," he said, descending the steps in a cloud of smoke.

Rachael quickly climbed the steps, joining Misha and Vera. When they entered the room, Vera said, "My God, I thought we had it downstairs." Rachael quickly covered Vera's mouth with her hand. She grasped Misha and Vera by their arms and whispered, "The room could have a microphone for the Gestapo! Never speak of our mission in this room! We must go outside of here for that. Do you understand?" With wide-eyed fear, Misha and Vera nodded their heads. She continued to whisper to them. "Tomorrow we will melt into the activity of the town. We will split up and talk to everyone who might speak freely with us about the camp. Got it?" Again, the frightened women nodded in the affirmative.

The next day, the three women split up and ventured into the town. Their

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objective was to interview anyone willing to discuss the camp that the Germans called Auschwitz. Rachael suggested that if necessary, they use the cover story that they were students from The University of Prague on a field trip. They had been “assigned” to investigate German prisons. It seemed plausible to Vera and Misha. She only hoped that they would not have to use it. As they walked onto the snow-covered sidewalk near the town center, they suddenly heard an explosion coming from the camp. Moments later, they saw thick, dark smoke over the camp. They looked at each other with fear.

At the same time, Jacob was standing next to his machine in the Farben factory. Suddenly, an explosion from the west rocked the entire compound. The ground rumbled as the violent shock wave crossed the factory. Several windows broke. Dirt, plaster and dust fell from the ceiling. A moment later, flames could be seen inside the camp, to the west. Everyone raced to the window, as clouds of thick black smoke rose over Crematorium A. Gunshots rang out from the same direction. “It’s the Czechs!” shouted Simcha, who was standing behind Jacob at the window. A wave of shouts, calls and applause rolled over the thousands of prisoners who stood near the windows. For the first time in memory, prisoners had rebelled.

Jacob was aware that the Czechoslovakian prisoners assigned to Crematorium A were planning a revolt. Simcha told him about it days ago. But they had not been aware of the date. Everyone thought it would be weeks or months later. Had something gone wrong? Still, those same prisoners were engaging the Germans in a heated gun battle.

Jacob’s heart raced with excitement. *Finally, we are beginning to fight back!* He desperately wanted to run there and help the prisoners with their revolt. He knew that some of the rebelling prisoners were not Jewish. Some were political prisoners. Others were accused of being homosexual, communists or a Gypsy. But, he also knew that the majority of the fighters were Jews. *Imagine this! Jews are fighting back! For the first time, Jews are fighting back!* Jacob’s excitement could not be contained. They were a spunky group, Jacob thought to himself. “I wish I could be with them now,” Jacob said softly.

“No you don’t,” said Simcha from behind. “Everyone in their barracks will be dead by tomorrow evening. You know that, Jacob.” Jacob knew that Simcha was right. The Nazis punished everyone even remotely related to those who broke the rules.

Jacob turned and looked up at Simcha. Simcha was once tall and athletic. He was about twenty years older than Jacob. Now, he was so thin and wasted that he resembled a weak old man. But now, he too had fire in his eyes. Yet, he was calm and collected. Jacob envied Simcha’s apparent control over his emotions. “Yes, Simcha. You are right. I have no desire to die. And bombing the ovens is a sure death sentence, whether you participated or not. But it was an act of great heroism. It will be weeks, perhaps months until Crematorium A is working again. Their courage and sacrifice will save lives, Simcha.”

Jacob patted his older friend on the arm. “They are heroes.” The two men glanced into each other’s eyes for a moment. Jacob said, “Our turn will come soon, brother.”

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Simcha smiled and grabbed Jacob's free arm. "Yes, Jacob. God-willing, our turn will come soon."

Rachael and her partisan comrades found a coffee shop in the center of town. Inside there were two groups of people gathered around tables. In the corner were four old men, speaking quietly. Near the window, she saw a group of three women. They were staring out at the smoke-covered camp and whispering to each other. Rachael purchased a cup of coffee and sat at the table nearest to the women. They were speaking rapidly in Polish. Surprisingly, instead of talking about the explosion inside of the camp, they were discussing the rude behavior of their husbands. One of them said that she was ready to kill her husband for excessive drinking.

"That bastard will meet his end the next time he comes home drunk and beats me," said a thin woman with blonde hair and a long bumpy nose. "I mean it," she reassured her friends. "I have even selected the right knife to do the job. If that bastard hits me one more time, it will be his last time on earth."

Rachael decided to wait for the right time to join the conversation. Then, another woman at the same table said, "My husband started doing the same thing last month. I warned him not to come home drunk again. But he said that it's his job at the camp. He said that he couldn't stand the stress of what they have to do there."

The third woman then chirped in, "My Walter has changed lately too. I've asked him what happens at the camp. But he won't tell me. He says that it's too terrible. And the look in his eyes is fearsome. I tell you, he's not the same person any longer! He has seen things that have frightened him terribly."

The blonde woman with the long nose broke in. "Come on. Everyone knows exactly what happens there. They bring in Jews and Gypsies by the trainload. Then they gas them and burn them. Why do you think this town is covered in ashes when the wind comes from the west?" The three women looked at each other in silence. Rachael, whose back was to their table, would have given her eyeteeth to see their expressions. Nevertheless, this was the kind of firsthand information that she needed in order to corroborate the camp's evil deeds for the Allies.

Rachael's heart was racing. She calculated a variety of ways to enter the conversation. Trying her best to be casual, she turned her chair around to face the women and said, "Do you think that you could get me into the camp?"

Suddenly, the conversation stopped. The three older women looked at each other, horrified. "Why do you want in there?" asked the woman who spoke of burning the Jews. Rachael realized that she had gone too far too quickly. The women were now frozen with fear.

"We are university students, from Prague. This camp is our project." The cover story that Rachael had devised seemed plausible. But the women were intransigent.

"Do you know what would happen to us and our husbands if we were caught taking you into the camp?" The women now stared at Rachael with wide eyes. Rachael struggled to keep the women involved.

"But, is there a way that you can get us into the camp? You see, we would

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be happy to work a shift for you. All that you would need to do is to give us your work papers. Then, we would enter the camp and perform your duties for one shift. You may relax at home or go out shopping. It will be a day off for you!"

The older woman who had been so talkative looked back at her friends. Suddenly, the fear turned into laughter. As the three women laughed harder and harder, Rachael and her spying colleagues joined in. The six women laughed for a long time. Two of the Polish women laughed so hard that tears ran down their cheeks. "They want to get *into* the camp," exclaimed one of them, still chuckling. This comment brought a new round of laughter. The fat woman looked at Rachael as though she were insane. "Lady, we just told you what happens inside the camp. "People are dying horrible deaths in there. Why on earth would you want to go in?"

Then the other woman interrupted. "I do not believe that we should be talking with you any longer." She looked at the fat woman and then at the talkative woman. In unison, all three women got up and silently walked out of the tavern.

Rachael was pensive for a moment. Suddenly, she jumped up and ran outside, chasing the three women. She pulled the talkative one aside. Looking into her eyes, she pleaded with the woman to speak with her alone. The other two offered a strange look and left. When they were alone, Rachael walked with the woman to a bench on the side of the road. "What's your name?" she asked.

The woman replied, "Nadia. I am Nadia Solowinski."

Rachael put her hand on top of the woman's hand. "Are you married, Nadia?" The woman nodded, yes. "Do you love your husband, Nadia?" Again, she nodded at Rachael. "Well, Rachael continued, "My husband is inside the camp. And, I love him very much."

Nadia looked surprised for a moment. She then laughed. "You cannot bring your husband out of the camp, even if you can get in."

Rachael grasped Nadia's hand in her own, tightly. "If I can get pictures of the Nazis killing and burning innocent people, I can give them to the Allies. Then, they can stop this madness before more innocent people are killed." After a moment of silence, Rachael took a calculated risk. "Nadia, do you want to escape with your husband?"

Nadia Solowinski stared at Rachael for a long time. "Who are you? Are you a spy? Who do you work for?" Nadia was alarmed. Yet, something held her interest.

Rachael replied softly, "It doesn't matter who I work for. And it is true that my husband is inside. Nadia blinked her eyes and swallowed hard. "You can help my husband and me to escape?" The expression on her face told Rachael that Nadia doubted her ability.

"Yes!" replied Rachael. "I can help you escape. As you saw, I am not alone. And, I have more comrades in the area. We can get you out. We can help you go to a safe location."

Nadia processed this information slowly. She clearly was afraid of being caught. Her frightened eyes pleaded for assistance. "I clean rooms for the Germans in the camp offices. Perhaps you could get in with my identification card.

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Our hair is the same color. But if you are caught, they will kill you and me!" She looked down for a moment, before speaking again "Then they will imprison my husband." She seemed to have made a decision. "No, I am sorry. I cannot help you with your plan. It is too dangerous.

Rachael was distressed. But, she was not about to give up. *I am smarter than her. I must find a way to convince her to help.* Rachael put her hands around Nadia's face. "Do you love your husband?" she asked. Slowly, Nadia nodded her head. "Then, do you not believe that working in that camp is bad for him? Is it not bad for you both?" Again, Nadia nodded silently. "As a matter of fact," continued Rachael. "I believe that a good man who works in a place like that can go mad. Being forced to do such terrible things to innocent people can change a person's mind forever! Do you want that to happen to your husband?"

Tears slid down her cheeks now, as Nadia again nodded her head. *Now, I've got her!* "Then, please, let me go in for you just one time. I promise that I won't be caught."

Nadia seemed heartbroken for Rachael. She whispered, "You promise that you will go in only one time?"

Rachael said, "I promise." Nadia stood up and walked to the window. Rachael saw that her hands were shaking.

After a moment, Rachael heard Nadia whispering to herself. "I hate this stupid place and I hate what everyone is doing." She suddenly turned around and stared at Rachael. "I will do it under one condition." Rachael stood and walked to Nadia, whose back was now against the window.

Rachael put her hand over Nadia's. "What is it that you want, Nadia?" A look of determination appeared on Nadia's face, as though she had just made an important decision.

"You must take both of us with you when you leave," she replied.

That was it. Rachael was relieved. Taking them back, in addition to Jacob, would be fine. They might need to learn how to survive in the forest while on the run. But she could teach them easily. Rachael felt obligated to ask one important question before agreeing to Nadia's plan. "You understand that there is a chance that the Gestapo will imprison or kill your relatives for helping us. You might be making life difficult for them, if they can be traced." Then something strange happened. Nadia began laughing. Rachael was worried. What sort of person laughs when told that their own action might be responsible for the destruction their relatives? Finally, Rachael became angry. "How can you laugh about something like the death of your family?"

Nadia controlled her laughter long enough to say, "I have no friends or relatives here. We are both from Russia." She laughed a little longer, before her expression changed to anger. After a moment longer, she spat out, "I suppose the Nazis already killed my family in Kiev, anyway." A tear fell from her right eye, landing upon the windowsill.

Nadia helped Rachael to the doorway when she suddenly stopped. Holding Rachael's jacket in her hands, she appeared frozen in time. She was working something out in her head. Finally, Rachael said, "What is it, Nadia?" Nadia handed Rachael her coat tenuously.

Rachael And The Partisans

She looked at Rachael and said, “You plan to take out your husband, don’t you?” Rachael did not reply. “How can you get a prisoner out without ruining the count? Do you realize that the Germans have roll call day and night and sometimes just for fun? If someone’s missing, they know about it right away. Then, they will chase you down wherever you are and kill you.

Rachael smiled and motioned to Nadia to sit down. “Of course, you’re right, Nadia. It would be almost impossible to escape from Auschwitz if the count is different. And you are correct also in saying that the Nazis hold surprise roll call at any given time – just to make sure that everyone is still there.” Nadia was following Rachael with rapt attention. Rachael continued, “So, Nadia, we make sure that the count stays correct. We sometimes place someone new into the camp. That person will assume the identity of the escapee. We’ve done this in some of the other camps in Poland. However, in this case, we will have melted invisibly into the countryside long before they notice someone is missing. You see, we have been trained in how to live off of the land. We have learned how to use camouflage in forests, fields and even cities. And, we have safe houses everywhere.”

Nadia interrupted, staring wide-eyed. “Who, exactly is ‘we?’”

Rachael smiled softly. “We are the partisans of Anton Chrusciel.” Rachael found herself repeating her group’s name with immense pride and satisfaction.

Nadia still looked confused. “Well, I don’t know about any Anton Chrusciel. But I think we will escape with you anyway.” Her brow furrowed again. “But, isn’t it so sad for the person who goes into the camp?”

Rachael again offered a brief smile. “Nadia, we use people who are often very sick. Some of them have consumption or infections or severe heart disease. We never send someone who is contagious. And we never send someone who doesn’t want to go. These people would gladly fight with us but lack the physical strength. They know that they are going to die soon anyway. But their conviction is with us and they want to make their death count for something. And by the way, we’re all going to die anyway, right? So, we partisans agree to make our mark with our lives. Why not die so that someone else might live?”

Nadia helped Rachael put her jacket on. She moved slowly, as though her mind was elsewhere. When she opened the door to let Rachael leave, she said, “Can I join your partisans?” Rachael smiled and walked away. From a distance, she turned and saw Nadia still in the open doorway. She was still smiling.

“We’ll let you know soon.”

Chapter 47

The Music Of Auschwitz

By January of 1944, Jacob had learned how to stay alive in Auschwitz. His left knee ached terribly, especially when he had to bear weight upon it. But he survived. He had learned how to use paper as insulation during the winter. He put old newspapers inside his shoes, trousers and his shirt. Whenever someone in the barracks died, the survivors fought over his possessions. A winter coat or leather shoes was considered a grand prize. Jacob was bothered by the thought of gaining from an innocent man's death. But he also realized that another man's coat could keep him alive. And, he had important work ahead.

After roll call, a watery gruel was given to the prisoners. It contained barely enough calories to keep a mouse alive. But Jacob ate every drop and licked the bowl clean. During warm weather, insects were always to be found in the prisoners' food. Unvarying, intense hunger was Jacob's constant companion. The prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau were in regular stages of starvation. It was not unusual for prisoners to lose a third or more of their body weight, should they survive at all. Jacob's weight had dropped precipitously. He now resembled the thin man at a circus. His arms and legs were thin stalks and his ribs protruded out from his chest.

Sometimes, Jacob went into buildings that housed the Germans. Watching them eat meat, fresh vegetables and fruit was terrible. The smell of fresh bread was pure torture. It nearly drove him mad. At night, Jacob dreamed about the wonderful smell of cooked stew and fresh bread. His hunger was constant and endless. His stomach often felt like it was twisted in knots. Jacob discovered that starvation was quite painful.

Although he was certain that he was still alive; Jacob had still not seen his father. They were able to get messages to each other through one of the kapos in Jacob's barracks. The poor man had consumption and he visited the infirmary regularly. The messages from his father were heartwarming. Jacob read them repeatedly, crying softly. In the first message, Moshe told Jacob to remember his mother and to honor her by "saying Kaddish" twice every day for a year, and thereafter on the anniversary of her death." Her demise had left an open wound in Jacob's heart. A piece of his soul seemed to have gone dark that fateful day when Hanna went into the gas chamber. Jacob's heart ached for her. Despite the grim environment, Jacob continued to believe that he, Rachael, their baby and his father would all survive this terrible nightmare. He also believed that he would one day lead fellow prisoners against their Nazi oppressors. He could not shake the certain feeling that his destiny was to save lives here.

One dark, freezing day in February, Jacob stood in line to leave the factory where he was assigned to work. He leaned against a wall just inside the factory until a kapo came along and yelled at him to stand straight up in line. Jacob's left

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knee had grown increasingly arthritic and painful. He walked with a limp and fought severe pain whenever he had to bear weight upon that leg. Jacob dreaded the long trek between the camp and the factory. Lately, with the weather cold and damp, he could barely make it. But Jacob walked on each day, despite the pain. He understood that a prisoner in this camp would be killed immediately if he had no value. And, the only value that Jacob seemed to have was his ability to work in the nearby factory. The only other job for a prisoner was that of kapo or crematoria staff (Sonderkommando). And, Jacob wanted no part of pulling dead bodies from the gas chambers and stuffing them into a blazing inferno. Each time he saw the notorious chimneys or smelled the smoke, he recalled his vivid and horrible dream. And that nightmare ended with his death.

Jacob was preoccupied with many thoughts on his way back to the camp. He hardly noticed that it had begun snowing. He tramped along in line behind the other prisoners as they made their way along the frozen dirt road. He was so deep in thought that he failed to notice how some of the prisoners were slipping here and there. The freezing wind pelted Jacob's face with white snowflakes. They stung his eyes and scratched his dry face. Jacob closed his eyes for a moment to relieve the irritation from wind and snow. Suddenly, his right foot slipped outward upon a sheet of ice that had been obscured by the new snowfall. Instinctively, Jacob planted his left leg to avoid falling. Too late, he realized his mistake. The poorly healed tendons in his left knee wobbled and then tore under the weight of Jacob's body. He screamed and fell to the ground.

For several minutes, Jacob writhed upon the ground, grasping his left knee. The wind was now screaming past his ears. Even upon the ground, it was loud. He cursed his knee for allowing such a stupid thing to happen. As the other prisoners continued along the road to camp, Jacob remained on the hard, frozen ground. He knew that he would be unable to walk by himself. Finally, the last of the prisoners had passed by. A German soldier who was guarding the group stood over Jacob. He asked Jacob if he could walk. Jacob replied that he could not. The soldier paused for a moment, and then raised his rifle to kill Jacob. Jacob could feel his heart pounding heavily. He had been near the end of the line. There had been no one nearby to see Jacob fall. Simcha, the Rabbi, the friendly kapo... all of his friends were far ahead. There was no one to help him. Jacob prepared for his death. *In some ways, death would be a blessing. It's all right. Go ahead and kill me. I am ready!*

Suddenly, Jacob saw a beautiful woman next to the German soldier. She had beautiful, blonde hair that framed an angelic face. The German soldier blinked his eyes and stared at her. She was a gorgeous apparition. Jacob blinked hard to clear his vision. She was still there. He closed his eyes tightly and opened them. Again, the beautiful woman was there. *What sort of vision is this? What are my eyes seeing? Where did this woman come from?* He could hear the German soldier talking to her. Jacob strained to hear the woman's voice, but it was barely a whisper. At one point, he heard her say that her name was Sophie.

Jacob lay upon the ground, still grasping his left knee. He was losing focus with the world. Was it the pain? He looked up and saw the woman open her coat. She wore a beautiful red satin gown, revealing a large portion of her generous

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breasts. For the first time, Jacob heard the soldier speak. "Where did you come from? Who are you? How did you get here?" The woman pushed her breasts up with her hands, exposing them completely. Her breasts were beautiful, large and supple. Falling snow melted upon her chest, leaving dots of water that sparkled upon her perfect skin. The soldier gazed longingly at her. She grasped the soldier's face in her hands and began to pull him away from Jacob. The young German soldier was completely mesmerized by "Sophie," his weak will no match for her powerful sexuality. She pulled the soldier towards a thicket on the side of the road. As they reached the dense shrubbery, she looked back at Jacob.

Suddenly, Jacob understood what she was doing. She was saving his life. Jacob yelled to her in Yiddish through the howling wind. "No, Sophie. Don't do it! Allow me to die!"

The seductive woman gave Jacob a soft smile. She replied to Jacob in Yiddish. "Do not worry, Yaakov Joshua. Have no fear. This is not your time." The woman led the aroused soldier into the dense thicket.

Jacob lost sight of them, but heard the soldier say, "No, Jew. It's my time!" Jacob remained freezing upon the ground, still clutching his knee. Suddenly, he heard a rifle shot from the thicket. Moments later, Simcha and the old Rabbi arrived, along with two guards. When they asked Jacob where the shot came from, he pointed to the nearby thicket. Jacob's friends and the soldiers converged upon the thicket, where Jacob could now see bright red blood upon the fresh snow.

Moments later, the guards pulled two bodies from the thicket. One was the young German soldier. The other was the body of an elderly woman, dressed in a long red low-cut gown. Jacob flinched and gasped when he saw the old woman. His mind was straining to locate reality. *How could an old woman have the appearance of youth and sensual beauty? The young guard and I both saw her as a young woman!* He blinked his eyes and shook his head, as if to clear away the cobwebs of a different reality.

Jacob's friends picked him up and began to carry him back to camp. In Yiddish, he asked his friends to describe Sophie's body. "Please," cried Jacob, "you must see if Sophie is dead!" His friends looked at each other in puzzlement. Finally, one of them shouted in Jacob's ear.

"I don't know who you mean, Jacob. There's only the dead soldier and the old woman." Jacob's mind reeled. "Then she killed the soldier?" he screamed. "How could a feeble old woman kill a German soldier?" Jacob tried to reason it out. "Did you see the woman?" Both men shook their heads. *Who just saved my life? How did she manage it?* But, the pain in his leg was terrible and he soon passed out.

When Jacob awoke, he was in a bright room. Something hovered above his face. It was too blurry to identify. Fearing it as an attack, Jacob struck out with his arms and hands. *I will fight it to the death.* He heard a noise. At first, it seemed like barking. Soon it resembled the voice of a man. At the same time, his vision was clearing. *It is a face! But who is it? Is it a friend, or foe?* And then his vision cleared and he saw his father's face. At the same time, he identified the voice as his father's. Jacob's heart exploded with joy. "Father! Oh my God,

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father!" Tears streamed out over his eyes and ran down his face. *Is this a dream?* He hugged his father and wept. After a long time, when he was able to talk, he spoke in halting breaths. "I'm so sorry about Mother," he croaked. "I'm so sorry, father." Jacob understood the devastating loss his father had experienced. He knew how strongly his parents loved each other. He could not bear the thought that his father carried such grief. "I love you, father. I love you. I'm so sorry." Jacob wept again.

Moshe stroked his son's short hair gently. He smiled as only a father can smile, after his dear son has been returned to him. It was like a miracle to Moshe. His precious son was alive. *If I were to die tomorrow, at least I will have seen Jacob once again.* "For some reason, I knew that I would see you once more, my son." Jacob noticed a certain unexpected calmness about him. He seemed gloomy, yet there was something else. *He's hiding something from me. What did he mean "once more?"*

For almost 48 hours, Jacob and Moshe were together. No father and son could have been more grateful for such a reunion. They talked and laughed, ate and napped together. They rambled on about their fishing and hunting trips, in areas as beautiful as to defy description. They discussed family and how the war might change the world. Like everyone, they talked about when the Allies would arrive. Will it be the Russians or the Americans? Will we live long enough to see our liberation? During this time, Moshe cared for the damage to Jacob's knee. He injected the knee with a solution to reduce the inflammation and placed it in a brace. Jacob was surprised at how much better it felt.

Before Jacob had to leave, his father sat down next to him in the back of the infirmary. It was quiet there. Moshe clearly had something on his mind. "Jacob," he began almost in a whisper. "When all of this is over, there is something that you must know. Terrible, terrible things are happening here, Jacob. The Nazis are vindictive, brutal and without conscience." Moshe suddenly seemed lost in thought. He looked down at the floor for a long time before he spoke again. "Jacob, I do research here. It does not involve any destruction. I want you to know that I did my best to damage the inhuman cruelty." Moshe stopped and looked up from the floor, staring into Jacob's eyes. Moshe looked like an old man; worn out and despondent. It broke Jacob's heart to see his father so disconsolate. But, Moshe's bright blue eyes still sparkled with fire and wisdom. As he had known throughout his life, Jacob marveled at his father's strength and intellect. *Of course you will not hurt anyone here, father. You are incapable of hurting someone. You are wise and strong and gentle. You are my rock and my foundation. I love you so much, father!*

Moshe now spoke as though it would be their last moment together. "Jacob, if I don't see you again, please know that I love you with all of my heart. You are the center of my life." Jacob interrupted, "No! No father. Stop. "We will be together for many years. You have a grandchild to live for!" Moshe gazed deeply into Jacob's eyes. He thought about Rachael's confession. *Oh, my wonderful son. I pray that your child has dark hair and brown eyes. If not, then I pray for your compassion. Oh, Jacob, you have meant so much to me. You are the light of my life.*

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Jacob became lost in his father's sparkling sky-blue eyes. Since childhood, he had felt as though his father could look deep into his mind, determining truth from fallacy, fact from fiction. Yet, this time, Jacob believed that his father was hiding something. *He's concealing something. Is he ill? Is it something about Rachael or the baby? What aren't you telling me, father?*

For a moment, Moshe wondered if he should tell Jacob about his heart condition. During the past year, Moshe's chest pain had increased steadily, particularly with stress and with physical exertion. His cardiac condition had grown very serious since their arrival at Auschwitz. Moshe was reasonably certain that this disease would be fatal within a few months – a year at the most. He desperately wanted to tell Jacob about his plan to damage the German medical experiments upon innocent victims. But he knew that Jacob would only worry about it. Under torture, he might reveal it to the Nazis. So, he remained silent. He never considered telling Jacob that Rachael had been raped by the commandant at Theresienstadt. No good could come from such knowledge. He finally spoke to Jacob in a hoarse voice. "My dear son, I'm not hiding anything."

Jacob stood at the infirmary doorway, shaking his father's hand. Then, they grasped each other in a lasting embrace. Jacob thought about how much comfort he had obtained throughout his life, from his father's embrace. He could smell the familiar smell of his father, a combination of cologne, pipe smoke and... something else. Jacob marveled at how each person he loved seemed to have their own unique scent. His father's scent reminded Jacob of love, safety, security, intelligence, kindness and warmth. He loved that scent with all of his heart. Moshe was the gentlest, most considerate and caring soul he had ever met. He thanked God for the privilege of being the son of Dr. Moshe Silverman. As he pulled back from the embrace, he noticed tears welling up in his father's eyes. "I love you, son," said Moshe.

"I love you too, father," whispered Jacob. Finally, Jacob turned and walked through the doorway. This was the last time that he would see his father.

Chapter 48

The Violin

Shortly after leaving the infirmary, Jacob's barracks commander told him to report to the commissary. That could mean only one thing. *I have an audition for the camp orchestra!* Jacob knew that playing in the orchestra was no immunity from death. Many orchestra members were sent to the gas chamber with their barracks-mates. And orchestra members routinely died from the many diseases that ravaged the prisoner population. However, Jacob's left knee had become a disaster. He could barely walk to and from the factory, let alone work there all day on his feet. And each evening, his swollen and distorted knee felt like someone had stabbed him. So, the camp orchestra was perhaps the only way to remain alive. *It would be a blessing.*

Jacob had also been told that orchestra members were given extra food. The Germans sometimes gave the orchestra leftover food. The scraps were a feast to a starving violinist. When the average inmate received about 400 calories per day, a treat like this was like heaven. On the other hand, many times they were sent back to their barracks with nothing, left to lay in the dark with their empty stomachs growling and cramping.

Later that day, while walking back from the factory in a driving snowstorm, Jacob suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. Three men who were walking behind him slammed into him. Despite a great deal of cursing and shouting, Jacob stood still, the freezing wind and snow pounding into his face and eyes. "I have no violin," he said. *What if orchestra members must own their own instruments?*

Suddenly, the butt of a rifle was smashed into his back. "Schnell," screamed an angry German guard. Jacob stared at the guard while trying to work his problem out. Now the guard turned the rifle around and pointed it at Jacob. That provided enough motivation. But as Jacob slogged through the snow to the camp, he was very worried.

As the line of workers finally entered the camp, Jacob saw Simcha walking towards him.

"Stop," called Simcha, although Jacob could barely hear him over the fierce wind and the roaring crematoria chimneys. Jacob squinted at Simcha, blinded by the snow that was pelting his face. Then, he noticed that Simcha was carrying something. It was dark and long and did not appear to be very heavy. After a moment, Simcha drew near and Jacob saw that he was carrying a violin case. He slowly handed the case to Jacob. Then, Simcha bent forward to say something. Their proximity to the furnace of Crematorium C required Simcha to yell into Jacob's ear. "Jacob, you must take this. The owner won't need it any longer." Take good care of it. It might just save your life... for awhile." Simcha abruptly turned and walked away.

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Jacob stepped back and smiled. "Thank you," screamed Jacob as loud as possible. But the ground was trembling from the fury of the fiery chimney. Moments later, he saw Simcha's fluttering right hand. That was enough recognition. Simcha had turned into Jacob's best friend.

On the way to the commissary, Jacob wondered about the condition of the violin. The more he thought about it the more despondent he became. *What if it is old or broken? What if the prior owner cared for it poorly? What if I can't get any new strings? What if it needs repair? What if it's decrepit and plays poorly?* By the time Jacob walked into the commissary, he had convinced himself that the instrument would not be in playable condition. He threw off his moth-eaten coat and placed it upon a chair. Members of the orchestra were talking near a fireplace. Jacob walked over and introduced himself. Most of the orchestra members did not even look at him. Two or three of them grunted. Only one of them bothered with an introduction.

Under relatively normal conditions, Jacob would have been offended by such rude behavior. Even in Theresienstadt, prisoners were generally kind to each other. But that was when they believed that they would live. Here, within the walls and electrified wire of Auschwitz-Birkenau, nobody wanted to be your friend. It would be too painful when your friend died. And in a death camp, like this one, nobody really expected to live very long.

But one person came to Jacob to introduce herself. The woman spoke Yiddish. She was a very attractive blonde woman. Jacob guessed that she was in her thirties. *It is so difficult to gauge a person's age here.* Many of the prisoners had shaved heads, making them look older. Virtually everyone was emaciated. Some people who looked young had white hair. Their depravation was endemic. Most of the people that Jacob saw walked around with mouths agape, staring at the ground. They resembled walking machines, with little life remaining in them. But this woman had gorgeous blue eyes and a cadence in her step. She presented her hand to Jacob. "Hello. My name is Golda Weinstein, from Baden. I play flute and piccolo. And you are...?" Jacob was stunned by this attractive woman's kind smile and generous offer of conversation. Despite being thin, Golda was beautiful, with a trim figure and sparkling smile.

A moment passed before Jacob could answer. He felt mesmerized by this woman. "You do have a name, young man?"

Jacob shuffled his feet and replied in a hoarse, breaking voice. "Yes, indeed. I mean, I do. Uh, I do have a name, that is." Golda laughed, revealing gleaming white teeth, under her radiant blue eyes. She seemed pleased that she could make a younger man stutter. After another brief uncomfortable moment, she said,

"And that name is...?" Jacob's face was now red as he shuffled his feet. He did his best to collect his nerves.

"I'm Jacob Silverman, from Salzburg."

Golda burst into a wide smile. "Well, it's been ages since I met someone from Austria. Although, it's not as though we were neighbors, with you up in the mountains. But we are still countrymen, are we not?" She was absolutely beaming with joy. Jacob could not explain it, but he was attracted to this woman. He

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was not drawn to her in a sexual way. Rather, he felt that they shared a common fate. “You are here for the audition, yes?” He nodded. “This is your violin?”

Jacob again shuffled his feet. “Well,” he began. “It’s not really mine. I mean I don’t own it. It was, well, uh... It wasn’t mine, before... I mean.” Jacob was flustered. *Why do I have so much trouble talking to this woman?* She laughed again, absently brushing silky blonde bangs from her azure eyes. *I feel as though I know this woman. Yet, I have never met her.*

As she turned to walk away, she said, “You might want to practice a little. Our conductor will be here at any moment. Then, you will be on stage.”

The moment of truth had arrived. Jacob sat at a nearby table and slowly pulled apart the locks on the violin case. Although the black case had been dented, the leather seemed to be in excellent condition. It was soft, but had not faded at all. At one time, this had been an expensive case. Bending forward over it, Jacob could smell the oil that had been used to keep the covering moist. *Well, at least the case is in good shape. Someone took care of this instrument.* He then slowly opened the case.

Inside, to Jacob’s tremendous surprise, was the most beautiful red violin that he had ever seen. In fact, he had only seen one violin like this one. Jacob’s heart began to beat faster. *It could not be...* He squinted to see the label. *I remember this instrument!* It said, “*Andreas Borelli, 1920.*” The only violin of this type that Jacob had ever seen belonged to a man named Emile Pouzol. Emile had been concert master of the Prague Symphony orchestra. He had let it be known to everyone that he owned a “1920 Borelli,” constructed by the famous Italian violin maker.

More than that, Pouzol was Jacob’s source of inspiration during his imprisonment at Theresienstadt. He was the man who taught Jacob more in just a few months than he had learned in six prior years. Emil had transformed Jacob’s talent from average to outstanding. He taught Jacob his technique and Jacob absorbed it like a sponge. Had they remained together longer, Jacob was certain that Emil could have made him a truly great violin player, perhaps one of the best in Europe.

Then Jacob saw something that stopped his breath. He saw the name *E. Pouzol* on the inside. It was Emil’s own violin! Jacob exclaimed loudly, “He’s here!” Everyone in the room heard him and stared at him. Some gave Jacob an emotionless, blank stare. They looked sad and turned away.

Golda, however, walked back to see what had sparked Jacob’s outburst. “Friend of yours?” she said quietly. Jacob was silent, still in awe of his discovery. His mind was whirling. *Is he really, here? Still here? After all, how long would a musician last, unless there was a place for him in the orchestra? If there were no position available for a violinist on the day of Emil’s arrival, he could be anywhere.*

Suddenly, Jacob’s heart sank. *He is probably dead.* Just as quickly, a new thought arrived. *Could he be here, in this room?* Jacob whirled around and scanned everyone in the room. No. There was no one who was even close to Emil’s diminutive posture. Emil was a small, delicate man. Jacob had marveled at how someone with such short fingers could play violin so deftly. He certainly

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would have appeared unfit for heavy work. *A flip of a coin was all the opportunity that Emil had to stay alive here.* The gesture of a bored medical officer at the train station decides who lives and who dies. Poor Emil could only appear as a helpless, frail man. He could not possibly pull his own weight in a factory or carry bodies to the fire. Some might guess that he would not manage the walk from the barracks to the factory.

“Was it someone close? Perhaps a teacher?” Jacob spun around to see Golda looking up at him. She seemed sad. She also seemed genuinely interested. Jacob sat in a nearby chair. He bent forward and ran his hands through his matted hair. He collected himself slowly. When he looked up, Golda had taken a seat on the other side of the table.

“Yes,” Jacob replied. “He was my teacher at Theresienstadt. He taught me more in a few months than I learned in my entire life. But, more than that – he was like a father to me.” Jacob paused as another wave of emotions rolled through him. “But he was different. He pushed me so much farther than I thought possible. By the time he was deported, I was changing my career ambitions completely. I had always planned to be a physician, like my father. But Emil gave me something I never saw as possible in myself. I knew that I was a good musician by the time that I was twelve. But I never believed that I might one day be great. And even when Emil taught me and showed me that I could be great, I never believed that I had the dedication and motivation to reach that level.” He looked up into Golda’s eyes and said, “He pushed me until it was no longer necessary. Without Emil, I would be nothing.” A tear welled out from Jacob’s right eye.

Golda deftly caught it with her left index finger, and wiped it away. “I’m sorry,” she said softly. Her eyes seemed to penetrate Jacob’s. Then, she put her right hand upon Jacob’s left cheek. The instant suddenly seemed strung out in time. A moment ago Golda was a perfect stranger. Suddenly she was consoling his grief with her touch. It somehow felt appropriate and he was grateful.

Suddenly embarrassed, Jacob pulled back from her soft embrace. “I’m sorry,” he said, making a point of straightening out his clothing. “I had no business telling you about my problems. Your problems could be worse than mine. And here you are consoling me. I should practice.”

Golda placed two fingers on Jacob’s lips, preventing further babbling. “Don’t worry, Jacob of Salzburg. I would not do this if I did not want to. And do not feel embarrassed. I have no ‘intentions’ on you. But somehow, you seem like someone that I should know. Someone that I should support.” She looked at the doorway, as the conductor was just then walking in. “But if I were you,” she whispered. “I’d warm up just about now.” Jacob devoured her pugnacious smile, as she turned and walked away.

When Jacob finally arrived at his barracks, he had missed dinner. But his smile told his friends that he had been successful. He could hardly contain himself as he described the audition. At first, Jacob was reluctant to play the beautifully maintained instrument. He felt unworthy. Finally, he gained the nerve to first tune and then play the violin. The mellow sound stunned him, and then made him eager for more. The quality of this red violin was far beyond Jacob’s mundane instrument. He botched a few technical notes during the session, but he

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had no trouble reading music. And, after some practice, he made the violin sing. His notes were pure and accurate. Afterwards, the conductor told Jacob that he would be happy to include him in the orchestra. The old man with disorderly long white hair and abundant sideburns even managed a smile. Later, Golda told Jacob that she had never seen the aged maestro smile. It was a magnanimous gesture, she told him.

Jacob's appointment to the Auschwitz orchestra had to be approved by the Germans, of course. And, Jacob's barracks commandant would be angry. Someone would be needed to replace him at the factory. That meant paperwork. If there was anything that the Nazis were passionate about, other than exterminating Jews, it was paperwork. Each time a prisoner entered the camp, moved, changed jobs, required medical treatment or died – there was paperwork to complete. And the Germans were champions of paperwork. The commandant was very angry. Although he had a mean disposition, he liked Jacob – as almost everyone did. “All forms in triplicate, signed, countersigned, stamped, sealed, filed and sometimes destroyed.” Jacob told his friends that he was not yet appointed. “Don't get excited yet, Simcha. The Germans could change it upon a whim.”

But the next day, Jacob was pulled aside from morning roll call. After carrying his paperwork to the commandant's office, and after obtaining the proper signatures and stamps – Jacob was finally a member of the orchestra. He was told to report to the commissary at once. As he limped through the snowy grounds with his new violin, he felt a strange sensation. He felt almost happy. At least, he felt as good as a starving person in constant pain could feel. He no longer had to walk to and from the plant. He no longer had to stand on his crippled knee for ten out of eleven hours. And, he would soon be able to scrounge for extra food, after playing for Nazi events.

Jacob suddenly noticed that he was whistling as he trudged through the heavy snow. The music came from a piece that the orchestra had practiced yesterday. It was Mozart's Symphony # 35, the “Haffner Symphony.” The music of the first movement, a spirited allegro, made Jacob happy. *Music is all that I have left to keep me sane. Wherever I go, whatever the circumstance, I have music in my mind. No one can take that from me. Despite my hardships, I can escape into the music. My love for music will never die.* His whistling began to alternate with humming, as Jacob vocalized additional instruments. It dawned on him that this was his first cheerful moment in months – since he was last with Rachael. This thought brought his music to a screeching halt. He stopped in the middle of the parade ground. “Where are you Rachael?” he whispered into the brisk, cold wind. There was no reply, except the howling cold wind. His shoes again crunched into the snow. His breath flew out as he walked, making a wispy white trail. “My God, Rachael. Where are you? Where is our baby? I love you so much!”

In the Auschwitz Orchestra, Jacob met a small Polish man named Paul Feldman. Feldman, who moved to Budapest with his family, was about ten years older than Jacob. He played cello. For the first few weeks, conversation was strained, at best. Jacob spoke very little Hungarian. He tried German, French, and even Czech. Being proficient with languages, Jacob slowly began to learn

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Hungarian. By the spring of 1944, they were communicating with ease.

Like Jacob, Paul had a wife who had escaped from the Nazis. They laughed at the thought that the two women might be fighting together with the partisans, while the men languished in prison. One late spring afternoon, they spoke while sharing a cigarette in Jacob's barracks. The winter sun angled into the small barracks windows, casting a yellow light. It illuminated specks of dust that sparkled while drifting lazily through the air. The men were quiet for awhile, enjoying the warm, spring afternoon. Jacob was first to speak. "I'm not so certain that my Rachael is fighting with the Partisans. Our baby was born only a few months ago." Jacob looked down at the dusty floor. "That is, I assume that she had our baby recently." He said this softly, his voice trailing at the end. Jacob had no idea if Rachael was still alive, or if she had delivered a normal baby, or if the baby was alive. Thus, he imagined wildly differing scenarios for Rachael and the baby. One of those imaginary situations was that Rachael had gone back to the partisans. Had he known that she was only two miles away, struggling to find a way to break into the camp, he would have forced her to turn around and run far away.

Feldman was a nondescript thin man in his thirties. In fact, he was so small and thin that Jacob sometimes wondered how he could hold his cello for such long periods. He had seen Feldman cry several times when the orchestra played for new camp arrivals. The penalty for telling new arrivals about the gas chambers was to be cremated alive. To suggest it by showing emotion was enough for the brutal Nazi guards. Orchestra members were warned time and again not to show emotion. Simcha told Jacob that he had seen a live cremation himself. A Sonderkommando had broken down one day and told his entire group of new prisoners of the fate that awaited them. SS guards with machine guns were required to control the hysteria. The next day, Simcha was on duty in the crematoria when they brought the young Sonderkommando in. Although he was a small man, it took six people to carry him to the opening of the fire.

Simcha watched from the doorway as the struggling man was placed on the rack that leads into the fire. The thunderous, roaring fire muffled his wild screams. They were supposed to place him in head first, so that he would die quickly. However, the wicked guards had placed him upon the rack feet first. As they pushed the rack into the fire, the man placed his feet against the outside of the furnace. His searing pain was tremendous, as the bottom of his feet burned off almost instantly. Steam rushed out of the poor man's tissues as they literally melted in seconds. His wild screams pierced the ears of everyone present.

In a moment, only stubs remained where his feet had been. The odor of burning flesh filled the crematoria. The man's feet were completely gone. Yet, the harder they pushed, the more he maintained his blocking position. He refused to move his smoking, melting stumps from around the opening. Simcha watched in amazement as the man's skin caught fire. The guards tried to push his burning stumps into the furnace, but could not get close enough without being burned themselves. The poor man continued to scream wildly. The fire slowly spread up his legs. Soon, the entire lower half of his body was on fire. His terrifying screams could be heard throughout that part of the camp. "The smell

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was unbelievable,” whispered Simcha. “You see, the smell of his burning flesh remained in the room, rather than going up the chimney. Fire enveloped his entire body. As the guards moved away from the burning man, he fell from the rack onto the floor. His entire upper torso was now on fire. Still alive, his arms and legs splayed wildly out in every direction. Despite his unimaginable condition, he was still conscious and still screaming. On the floor, the poor man screamed and writhed helplessly. The lower half of his body was now scorched black. Simcha watched helplessly as pieces of burning flesh fell from his legs onto the floor. “I watched as his face and eyes burned, Jacob. I see those burning eyes now in my sleep.”

From that moment on, Jacob observed Feldman closely when the orchestra played for new arrivals going into the gas chambers. Once he gave Paul his handkerchief to wipe tears away. Later, he realized how stupid he was to do that. The Nazis were more likely to see him hand his handkerchief to Feldman than they were to spot tears on his face. They were fortunate, that day. Still, Feldman thanked him for it.

Over the next few months, they became close friends. Jacob told Paul about his escape from Theresienstadt and how he and Rachael had joined the partisans. Feldman seemed immensely interested. He wanted to know everything about the partisans. He was particularly interested in how they might help someone escape from Europe.

Paul told Jacob that he had moved to Warsaw. He played second cello in the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra. He also held faculty status at Warsaw University and had many private students. But one day, two years ago, Paul and his wife were relocated into what was called the “Warsaw Ghetto,” a place where tens of thousands of Jews were forced to live in squalor. They were concentrated into apartments meant for a fraction of the new Jewish occupants. There was no running water, no electricity, no medical care and almost no food. Punishment for being caught outside of the ghetto was death. Jacob listened as Paul described the wonder of defying the Nazis and the horror of the eventual destruction of the ghetto by German troops.

“You should have seen us fight the Germans, Jacob,” sighed Paul with a sly smile. At first, no one thought that we had any chance of stopping them. We had to smuggle guns into the ghetto. Each night, three or four of us would escape from the ghetto and go into the countryside to meet with the partisans. Jacob, we bought so many guns from them. Of course, we paid far too much. But many of us in the ghetto had taken all of our money with us. Sometimes, we paid them with diamonds and jewelry. You should have seen the partisan’s eyes light up. We gave them so much. In return, they gave us all sorts of guns, ammunition, grenades, dynamite, and even grenade launchers. Over the course of several months, we collected hundreds of guns. And while few of us had any military training, we learned how to defend our little ghetto.”

Jacob watched Paul’s face light up as he described how Jews had learned to fight and defend themselves. He was very proud of their defense of the ghetto. “Jacob, each and every day, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto lived in constant fear. Not a day passed by without some Jew being put to death by the Germans. But

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something new happened, Jacob. We started to fight back. At first, the Germans were surprised. They had no idea that we had weapons, much less the nerve to use them. But, Jacob – we had chutzpah! Can you believe it? Jews actually fighting back, for a change!” Paul paused for a moment, deep in thought. Jacob wondered if the story was over. Finally, he asked, “What happened then?”

Pulling himself out of his deep thoughts, Paul looked up at Jacob. His face had become pale and strained. His eyes were moist with bitter remembrance. For some time, he remained silent.

Finally, Jacob touched Paul's arm softly and spoke. “Paul, please tell me what happened.” As the story unfolded, Jacob wondered if Feldman would be able to tell it without crying. “I'll understand if you can't tell me, Paul. But, I would very much like to hear the story of your Warsaw ghetto war with the Germans.”

Cautiously, in a whisper, Paul began. “In November 1940, the Germans established the Warsaw ghetto. The Jewish population still living outside the ghetto was forced inside the special area. Poles living within the ghetto boundaries were ordered to move out. Small factories, shops and stores were allowed two weeks more, until December 1st, to complete their evacuation. But, beginning with November 15th, no Jew was allowed to leave the Jewish precincts. All houses vacated by Jews were immediately given to Polish merchants and others who served the Nazi cause.”

He paused for a moment, looking down. Jacob imagined Paul thinking about his own lost apartment or house. “The walls and barbed wire surrounding the ghetto grew higher every day until, on November 15th; they completely cut us off from the outside world. Contacts with Jews living in other cities and towns were cut. Jewish workers could no longer earn a living. All of us became unemployed. The ghetto population was increased by thousands of Jews, evicted from neighboring towns and the countryside. Everything taking place outside the ghetto walls became more and more distant. The hunger increased daily. From dark, overcrowded living quarters it got out into the streets. It came into sight in the shape of ridiculously swollen, log-shaped bodies with diseased feet. They were covered with open wounds, wrapped in dirty rags. Beggars were everywhere, in the streets and courtyards. They included the old, the young, and the children. Children begged everywhere, in the ghetto as well as on the 'Aryan' side.”

“Small boys crawled through the barbed wire to obtain food on the other side. They supported entire families in this manner. Often a lone shot in the vicinity of the barbed wire told the casual passers-by that another little smuggler had died. A new 'profession' appeared, the so-called 'catchers.' Boys would snatch packages from pedestrians and bring them into the ghetto for their families, or to sell. Simultaneously, spotted fever raged in the ghetto. Yellow signs reading 'Spotted Fever' began to appear everywhere. The hospitals handling such diseases were overcrowded. Hundreds died every day. The gravediggers were unable to keep up. We ended up with mass graves, while dozens of other bodies were stacked. They were sometimes left for days. The dismal graveyard assumed a sickening, sweetish odor. The epidemic kept growing. Then, just as suddenly, typhus was everywhere. Between hunger and disease, we were losing

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about 2% of our population each month.” Paul stopped for a moment. He opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it. Whatever he meant to say would remain hidden from Jacob.

Feldman paused to light another cigarette from the stub of the first one. Its bluish smoke drifted up through the still air of the deserted barracks. He continued in a low, steady voice. “We made Molotov cocktails and hand grenades. Whenever possible, we smuggled all sorts of arms into the ghetto. By late summer of 1942, the Germans were deporting large groups of Jews to death camps all over Poland and Germany. They also found a way to divide the ghetto into five separate areas, making communication among the fighters difficult. Finally, in the spring of ’43, the Germans decided to liquidate the entire ghetto. But we had a surprise for them. We ‘allowed’ the SS columns to penetrate part of the ghetto. When they stopped to bivouac at Mila and Zamenhofa Streets, we had them trapped in a deadly crossfire. For hours we poured it on them! We had one working machine gun, many small arms, plus hand-made grenades.”

Paul looked up at Jacob. He was smiling. “Jacob, you should have seen it – a handful of badly outnumbered, untrained Jews pounding the German Army until no German soldier remained alive. It was just like the story of Hanukah! And there in Warsaw, for a few days, the mighty German armed forces were defeated by a rabble of poorly led, poorly equipped Jews.”

Jacob smiled back at Paul. “It must have been a wonderful moment,” he said.

But Paul was already continuing the story. His face now darkened with sadness, he continued in a low, raspy voice. “For five days, the Germans gave us a chance to surrender. We gave them more bullets as our answer. Emboldened by our brave fighting, some of the partisans in outlying areas began to hit the Germans as well. And for a few days, we were beating the powerful Third Reich. By early May, the Germans had stopped trying to communicate with us. And, in addition to food and medicine, ammunition was now in short supply. On May 8th, the Germans moved back in. Our units that had exhausted their ammunition began to commit suicide, just like Masada! Some of us tried to escape through the sewers. But the Germans trapped the escaping Jews and sent poison gas into the sewers, killing all of those who remained.

“On May 10th, we were done for. The Germans sent crack troops into the ghetto to fight us. Without ammunition, and with no way to escape, those few of us left alive were forced to surrender. We were sent here.”

Paul was unable to continue. Jacob could see the various gun battles playing back through Paul’s mind. With each battle, friends were killed. Jacob wanted to ask Paul about his family. But after seeing the monumental anguish caused by re-telling the story, he decided to wait for another time. Paul wiped his tears away and slowly got up. “Jacob, too many Jews have died in our effort to get this story out to the world. You will make sure that the world hears this, won’t you?” Jacob could only nod his head in agreement. He was too choked up to speak.

Chapter 49

The Rise Of Jacob's Courage

On a warm spring day after an afternoon performance, Jacob and Paul walked together to the commissary. It was April and it had rained for three days in a row. The ground had turned completely to mud and each step was like walking through quicksand. One's foot would sink deep into the quagmire. Then, the other foot came out from the mud with a loud slurping sound. Many times, the two had to stop when one of them lost a shoe. A long, painstaking ordeal was now required for what would normally be a casual two-minute walk. However, it gave them time to talk. And the slurping sounds of their feet muffled their words.

They had been having a good-natured argument about why there were no great female composers. Suddenly, Paul changed the subject. "Silverman, just how good is that bad leg of yours?" Jacob met this unusual question with silence. Undaunted, Paul continued. "Well can you run? I mean if you had to, could you run fast enough through the forest to escape capture?"

Jacob's mouth was sent agape. "Paul, what the hell are you talking about? Feldman stopped and looked directly at Jacob's eyes. After a short moment, he asked, "Silverman, if I could arrange an escape, could you lead me to your partisans?" Jacob was astounded. It had been a long time since he had thought about escape.

As time passed, and Jacob remained in the Auschwitz-Birkenau orchestra, word of resistance in many barracks reached him. Each time, Jacob wished that he were among the rioting prisoners. In reality, he knew that his left leg was badly damaged after his escape from Theresienstadt. It should have been surgically repaired. Of course, the Nazis paid no attention to the medical requests of prisoners. So, Jacob's left leg healed poorly. He walked with a severe limp. At times, his balance was so poor that he had to lean upon something for fear of falling. Had he been able to access proper medical care, a cane would no doubt have been issued to him.

"I'm sorry, Paul," Jacob said in a low voice. "I would be a liability during an escape attempt. My leg is too badly injured." Jacob struggled to restrain himself from the excitement of volunteering for escape. He sadly realized that if he were to play a role in a rebellion, it would be as a planner – not a participant. Jacob also discovered that it was very difficult to coordinate rebellion among barracks. To travel to another barracks, one had to either sneak past or bribe tower, gate and patrol commanders. One had to be physically fit for such actions. The vast majority of prisoners caught attempting to visit another barracks were shot. Some were simply added to the next trainload of prisoners destined for "special treatment," or the gas chambers. Thus, there were few major, coordinated acts of prisoner rebellion at Auschwitz-Birkenau. But there were some acts of disobedience within groups of prisoners. Jacob placed his hope in this

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type of rebellion.

Jacob asked Paul what he had in mind as an escape plan. But, Paul now seemed reluctant to discuss it. Jacob's answer was not the one Feldman had anticipated. "I was hoping that you would show me the way, Jacob. After all, you were with the partisans."

Jacob saw that Paul was exasperated. "I'm so sorry Paul. Perhaps I will be healthier a few months from now." The discussion of escape abruptly ended, although it was never again far from Jacob's mind.

As the weeks and months passed by, Jacob's left knee continued to heal, albeit poorly. He now had arthritis surrounding the damaged joint. And his knee was unstable. It wobbled when he stood up and when he was leaned on it. He was prone to falling for what appeared no reason at all. He could bear minimal weight upon the leg without falling. He feared that if he used a crutch, the Germans would send him to the gas chamber. Only fit workers survived in Auschwitz. So, Jacob learned how to stand up and walk without bearing much weight on his left leg. But the pain was now horrendous. Whenever it was cold and damp, Jacob's knee pushed to greater heights of agony. This too he hid from the Nazis. For them, he must appear fit as a fiddle.

Throughout the summer of 1944, Jacob remained in the same barracks. He continued to live with Simcha and his friends in Barracks 29, but now spent his days with the orchestra members. He did what each prisoner did in Auschwitz – try to live for one more day. And, despite the occasional extra food from being in the orchestra, Jacob was still wracked by hunger. It was his constant, evil companion. Week-by-week, Jacob's weight fell. His ribs began to protrude farther through the skin on his chest. The muscle, which had covered his arms and legs, had atrophied. His skin had taken on a sallow, grayish-yellow cast. With warm weather upon them, Jacob taught Simcha how to select and consume insects and small mammals. "You will need protein from any available source," he had told him. By mid-summer, Jacob was supplementing his gruel with earthworms, crickets, grasshoppers and roaches. He knew how to kill a mouse or rat and locate the flesh appropriate for eating.

Jacob felt no revulsion when he consumed bugs and mice parts. He understood that it was necessary to survive. Some prisoners mocked him and Simcha for consuming insects. But, when one is starving, any source of calories and protein becomes a target.

In September, Jacob noticed that more of his teeth had loosened. He could not recall seeing – much less using – a toothbrush. His molars seemed on the verge of falling out! Jacob wondered if Rachael would still love a toothless husband. He thought about her constantly. *Where is she? What is she doing?* He imagined what their child looked like – as a boy and as a girl. Rachael's absence was like a thorn in his heart. The pain was never-ending. He felt the same pain with his father's absence. This melancholy was particularly intense at night, before sleep. He vowed to survive, if only long enough to see his beloved Rachael one more time.

As the months passed and seasons again changed, Jacob's misery turned into despair. Despite the fact that Jacob had many close friends at Auschwitz, he

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had never felt so alone. And yet, he was haunted by the feeling that he was meant to do something important here. Like a splinter in his mind, Jacob's future called upon him constantly. *But, what am I to do here? Must I wait until they force me to operate the crematoria? If I wait for that to happen, will I die, as my dream foretold? God, please tell me what I am here to do.*

Jacob's mind wandered in deep amazement at how much his life had changed. He should have been at university or beginning his career. The motivation there was to become a professional. Here, people lived in the constant fear of being gassed or shot to death. At any moment, their barracks could be ordered for an unscheduled roll call. Death waited around every corner. Jacob was afraid. He had been afraid for so long. He was sick and tired of being afraid all of the time! At any moment, Jacob and his friends could be added to the list for the gas chamber. Roll call had become as routine as breathing. Many of them were during weather unfit for human exposure. It was almost always either too cold or too hot.

There was a probability that at least one barracks-mate would collapse into unconsciousness during any given roll call. Jacob was constantly afraid of being unable to stand up long enough for the end of each roll call. Bearing weight upon his left knee created agony. His torn ligaments had healed badly and he was left with bone grinding into bone inside his knee. Whenever he had to stand on it, the pain was overwhelming. Although he could perform his orchestra job sitting down, he had no such assistance during roll call. And to fall down during roll call usually meant certain death. Two or three times each day, Jacob suffered incredible pain when he had to stand for roll call.

One blistering hot day in July, Jacob stood in line for afternoon roll call. The heat and humidity was oppressive. The Germans drank constantly from their canteens. But, the prisoners, who had been working all day, had nothing. Perspiration dripped endlessly from Jacob's body. Men were dropping all around him from the oppressive heat. It had been like this for almost two weeks straight. This daily agony was burning itself into Jacob's soul. *No one is meant to suffer like this.* Sometimes, the pain was so great that Jacob believed he would be better off dead. Yet, each time he came close to giving in during roll call, he found that he could not. Something deep inside told Jacob to wait. *There is a reason why I am here and I must not give up. I cannot die until my task has been completed.* Some deep unrelenting force told Jacob to stay alive a little longer. *Something is going to happen and I have a role to play. But what will it be? And, when will it happen? Why was I brought to this place and time? What does God have in mind for me? What am I supposed to do, and when?* These thoughts tortured Jacob as he struggled to remain standing during each roll call.

Chapter 50

Jacob's Plan

On a hot and humid evening in late August, Jacob sat alone on the front stoop of his barracks. The men from his barracks were working the second shift at the rubber plant and he was alone for now. He had spent the afternoon playing Mozart and Wagner for new arrivals.

Each time he played for incoming prisoners, Jacob's mind was tortured. He had memorized the music a long time ago and was now free from looking at the music. Instead, Jacob could observe the long lines of arriving prisoners as they passed before the orchestra. The faces of those prisoners haunted Jacob. By now, they were almost all certainly dead. Watching the children on their way to the gas chamber was particularly exasperating. Many of them romped and skipped and played with each other, as if they were on holiday or on a trip to the beach. Their parents walked stoically next to them, gazing into a world that would soon be without them. It was heartbreaking to watch.

Yet, day after day, Jacob had to watch these poor innocent people being led to slaughter. He felt his mind bending in agony for these unfortunate souls. But, the faces of the children remained burned into Jacob's mind. He saw them at night when he tried to sleep. *So many thousands of innocent people, led to their death – and for what? What did they do to deserve this? And, how can I go on living, watching, waiting for my own death? Why is God allowing my people to be destroyed?* Jacob saw someone who resembled his mother in the morning arrival group. It unnerved him to see this woman who so remarkably resembled his gentle mother. *God, I am waiting for a signal. When will I be called into your service? How much longer must I wait?*

And then, a surprising new thought emerged. It really came from nowhere. This simple thought was spinning and enlarging in Jacob's mind, until its purpose had become so very obvious that he could not believe he had not considered it sooner. The Nazis were incredibly anal over paperwork and data. It was a compulsion for them. But Jacob now began to think of it as a useful way to hurt them. The Nazis accounted for each and every person who entered the camp. They also accounted for the deaths of those people. After all, the population of the camp seemed relatively stable. But, it's the paperwork that I'm after.

Feldman recognized his thoughts as brave and also with fear. He wondered if information about the camp could be sent to the Allies. The trick, he thought, was gaining access to the records. *If I could show some of this paperwork to the Allies, it might speed their destruction of this evil place. After all, the Allies were over-flying the camp now, on their way to bomb high-value military targets.* Everyone heard the sirens, followed by the deafening sound of hundreds of British or American planes. Some of the new prisoners insisted that the planes were Russian.

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Jacob didn't care where the planes came from. Like his friend Albert, he desperately wanted to get information about the camp to the Allied leaders. Their ideas became a plan. *I will begin immediately to collect every piece of valuable intelligence and data about the camp and its purpose. Somehow, I will collect plans that show the gas chambers and crematoria. Somehow, I will collect pictures of mass killings, torture and medical experimentation. Somehow, I will accumulate proof of the Nazi killing machine. And, I will somehow find a way to smuggle this data to the Allies, so that they will bomb this camp into the ground.*

Soon, the plan became a compulsion for Jacob. He understood that this was not why he was brought into the camp. There was some other, higher purpose for him. But, this was also an important act. It was a way to get back at his tormentors. By the time his companions returned from the factory, Jacob was ready to put his plan into action. He also became aware that he had a limited amount of time in which to implement his plan. *I may not be alive much longer. And, I need help from those who may not live much longer. Time is not on my side.*

At any moment, the residents of any barracks could be called upon to line up for their final roll call. Sometimes the factory no longer needed workers. For something as simple as a machine die changeover, the entire population of a barracks would be sent to the gas chamber. The *Sonderkommando*, who operate the crematoria, were typically sent as a group to the gas chamber themselves every two or three months. Their replacements burned their bodies within a day or two. Thus, every prisoner at Auschwitz lived each day as though it were his or her last. The emotional upheaval was chaotic at best. People relived every action for which they felt guilty. Many had already lost close relatives because of Nazi atrocities. They now understood the horror that their relatives had experienced. Those who had not, despaired for the anguish of the survivors.

The weeks flew by and Jacob grew ever thinner. His left knee ached constantly. He was very weak. The luscious banquets that the orchestra had once observed were now a thing of the past. The Germans were no longer happy conquerors. They had become nervous, edgy and anxious. They had fewer parties. The orchestra no longer could partake of whatever was left after the party. And, the camp commandant refused to allow Jews access to any food that could be consumed by Germans. Everyone suspected that the Germans were losing the war. News of the great Allied invasion at Normandy had spread like wildfire. Were the Allies now near the camp? Jacob had yet to implement his plan. He required a great deal of assistance, and he had to persuade people to help him. This was the most time-consuming part of his task.

Despite the constant hunger and pain, Jacob remained true to his plan. He thought of little else. *How much of this world of terror and death is the rest of the world aware of? Does anyone know of our suffering?* Of course, the Nazis would keep something like death camps a secret. Most of the general population either hated Jews or would feel obliged to obey their government and military leaders. Jacob began to tremble. He was approaching a defining moment in his life. He understood that the crimes being committed in this hellish place would one day be recorded in the annals of history. But, someone had to tell the world

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about it. Jacob now found himself in the position of deciding how much his life was worth. Everything had changed. In three years, he went from prosperity to ruin, from college parties to desperation and from liberty to the doorway of death. He could demonstrate his commitment to his people and his loved ones. Or he could follow orders and wait for his turn into the gas chambers.

In order to accomplish his plan, Jacob had to collect as much data as possible, including German Army documents, plans, records, building permits, housing construction, rail transportation, relocation orders and photographs. Then, he planned to add his own testimonial, in addition to other anecdotal sources of information. This package had to be delivered to someone who could transport it out of the camp and to the major newspapers of the world. At first, he told no one about the plan. Then, slowly and carefully, Jacob began to ask for help from prisoners he could trust. Simcha was first. And, he knew that he could also trust Paul.

Participating with the orchestra, Jacob had more free time and more access to the camp than the average prisoner. Simcha and Paul eagerly vowed to help Jacob to collect information. Simcha knew of Paul's escape plan, but told no one else. Unfortunately, Simcha had to work in the factory, as did everyone else in the barracks. They were locked very tightly after work. Escape would be virtually impossible. Simcha knew this, but wished to help the plan in any way.

Three weeks later, Simcha pulled Jacob aside during their evening meal. "I need to speak with you Jacob," grunted Simcha as he pulled Jacob's right sleeve. They moved into a dark corner where no one could hear them. It was hard to see Simcha's face in the shadows. Only the white stubble of his beard showed, surrounding his round face. Jacob was amazed to see how his friend's physical condition had deteriorated. In the past year, he had aged terribly. "I've got some news for you Jacob." Jacob looked into Simcha's face and immediately saw that it was important. Simcha's eyes seemed receded into his skull and his pallor was gray. Jacob could hear him wheezing with each labored breath. *He's got cardiac insufficiency, probably secondary to heart failure.* For a split second, he thought about his eagerness to enter medical school. He had learned so much about medicine from his father. *If it weren't for the Nazis, I would be in one of Europe's best medical universities. I should be flirting with Rachael over a pint of beer at a Pub near my hospital. Instead, I am a prisoner in a horrible death camp, talking to an old man who is about to do something for his people before he dies.*

"Jacob!" Simcha was pulling on his sleeve again. He had been drifting mentally. Jacob found himself pulled away from reality more and more often. That too he was able to diagnose. It was an effect of malnutrition. His brain was receiving far too little nourishment for the energy it needed. He found it hard to focus his thoughts because his brain was literally starving.

"Listen to me!" Simcha pulled on Jacob's sleeve again. Jacob was annoyed and pulled away. "Well, at least I got your attention," said Simcha. "Listen to me. I've got some news from my friend in the administration building." Simcha's eyes abruptly became misty. He looked down for a moment. When he looked back up, Jacob saw that he was crying. Jacob put his arms around Simcha's

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shoulders. His friend's body lurched twice, while he looked down and covered his face with his hands. Finally, Simcha straightened himself up and wiped his tears away. Looking directly into Jacob's eyes, he said, "We've been selected for the crematorium. We are to begin working there on Monday." Simcha paused again, trying to collect himself. Jacob waited patiently, his arms still upon Simcha's arms. "Jacob, if you can give me a camera with film, I will give you the pictures that you need to tell the rest of the world what happens here. In fact, Jacob, it would be my honor to give you those pictures." Simcha's voice quavered on the word "honor." Jacob looked into Simcha's eyes and smiled. "I'll get a camera for you. That would be my honor."

After orchestra rehearsal the next day, Paul came to Jacob. "Jacob," he said with smile. "Walk with me for a moment." They walked out of the commissary into a bright sunny fall day. The temperature had finally reached the sixties and the camp came alive again. Perennial flowers and tufts of new green grass poked their tender leaves above the mud. The fresh breeze caressed Jacob's cheeks. He marveled at how beauty could exist in a place so incredibly terrifying. Jacob smiled at Paul. "Feldman, I need a camera." Then, with a wink of his left eye, he said, "With film."

Paul thought about it for a moment. Suddenly, his eyes lit up. "I know where I can get one," he offered with his own smile and wink. "But I'll need it back as soon as you're done."

They walked along in silence, enjoying the golden warm sunlight and the soft, gentle breeze. "It's lovely," said Jacob.

Alfred looked at him and whispered, "How can something so beautiful be in a place so horrible?"

Jacob smiled and said, "That's exactly what I was thinking." They laughed briefly. It felt strange to Jacob. He suddenly realized that he couldn't recall the last time he had laughed. *To lose something so simple, yet endearing to our soul is truly frightening.* "Anyway, Feldman, you wanted to talk to me about something. So, what is it?"

Paul's face changed. His smile disappeared. He stopped. They stood facing each other. Sunlight danced off of Paul's circular eyeglasses. His eyes, already made too large by the round spectacles, spread wide open. He moved close to Jacob's left ear and spoke in short, measured tones. "I can get what you want, Jacob." Jacob stared at Paul but said nothing. Paul continued, this time using his hands and finger to make points. "Each day now, I give cello lessons to none other than Commandant Hoess." Paul moved back slightly and smiled at Jacob, who continued to stare at Paul with a speechless expression.

Finally, Jacob found his tongue. He stammered out, "You tutor the camp commandant?" Still smiling, Paul nodded his head.

It was an unbelievable stroke of luck. Paul told Jacob about the commandant's office. "Jacob you cannot imagine what I see there. There are all sorts of files and maps. There are also prisoner records. Some of them describe how many prisoners Crematoria A kills or Crematoria B. There was a file from the infirmary called 'Special Experiments on Human Subjects.' Jacob, I saw construction blueprints, maps for Birkenau IV and letters from Himmler himself.

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They say to move forward with prisoner processing at the fastest rate possible. Don't you see, Silverman?"

Paul was literally trembling with excitement. He voice was shaky and he was stuttering. Jacob placed his hands upon Paul's shoulders. "Please, Feldman, settle down. You are much too excited. And don't talk so loud. Voices can carry a long way in the wind." Jacob recalled earning a scouting merit badge for showing how a wind-blown voice can carry surprising distances. He smiled, thinking about his wonderful days as a Boy Scout. Suddenly, he felt a tugging at his sleeve. He looked down and saw Paul staring at him, with his left hand upon Jacob's right sleeve. He had been drifting again.

Paul took a moment to calm himself. Then, he spoke in a still-shaky voice. "Don't you see Jacob? Hoess was told by Himmler to run Auschwitz at full speed and at full capacity. Now, why do you suppose that they have to kill us faster? Could it be that they are losing the war and they need to bury the evidence of their crime? Jacob, this is big. We have to get word out to the Allies immediately! At the rate they are killing us; there might not be any Jews left to kill soon!"

Paul's words hit Jacob like hammers. *The Nazis are speeding up the killing. I must get word out as rapidly as possible. With each day, thousands more die.* As Jacob began to drift again, he felt the all-too-familiar tugging upon his sleeve. Paul was doing his best to keep Jacob in the conversation. Yet, with so little to eat, it was difficult to focus. "But there's more, Jacob." Paul smiled broadly again. "In the corner of the room, in an old, dusty chair, are three or four cameras." Now Paul was tugging upon both of Jacob's sleeves. "Did you hear me Jacob? I'll have a camera for you no later than Tuesday."

Jacob walked away with a long-lost spring in his step. He was finally doing something important again. The last time that had felt this was with the partisans, on operational missions.

Jacob turned back and smiled. Cupping his hands together in front of his mouth, he said, "Don't forget the film." Paul heard him, waved his hand and smiled.

While walking back to his barracks that sunny day, Jacob smiled. Birds chirped loudly in a nearby birch tree. "I'm almost ready," Jacob said to himself. *Soon, we'll have everything that we need, including pictures of the Nazis as they force us to burn the bodies of innocent men, women and children. Soon we will have proof of genocide to show the world. Then they surely will save us. Even if they destroy the camp, it will be a victory. After seeing our evidence, they couldn't possibly turn their backs upon us.* Jacob had no doubt that the Allies would use the evidence to rescue them or destroy the camp. For the first time in many months, Jacob slept well that night.

The next day, Jacob awoke with concern. His plan to smuggle out information about the camp depended upon someone's ability to get past the gate. Since hundreds of civilian workers came into and left the camp each day, identity cards were used. That way, the Germans could carefully control the flow of employees. Guards were trained to match the employee's face to the picture in their papers. The feeling of concern continued for several more days.

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Finally, one night in late April, he was talking quietly with Simcha. He whispered into Simcha's ear. "Simcha, I am worried. My plan requires someone to leave the camp, taking our evidence with them. Even then, if someone had the papers to get through the gate, how would they escape? Few of us can fend for ourselves in the woods. I don't know what to do, Simcha." Jacob was so frustrated that he was shaking.

Simcha smiled and waved his hand at Jacob. Then, he whispered in Jacob's ear. He whispered so quietly that it was difficult to hear the message. Jacob strained to hear every word. "I have a contact in the partisans." Jacob was so startled that he jerked his head up and hit the ceiling. The men nearby were still sleeping. "Do not ask me how, Jacob," whispered Simcha. "But, we should move fast. I might not have much more time." Simcha suddenly was wracked by a coughing fit. His chest made a rattling sound with each cough. Jacob feared that he had pneumonia. Having pneumonia, on top of heart disease was serious, let alone being starved and overworked.

Somehow, Simcha seemed more relaxed than ever before. He smiled more. He was even gentler. Jacob traced this change back to the day that Simcha agreed to help with Jacob's plan. Now, even with death at his doorstep, Simcha took charge of his own life. He would meet death with dignity and with the satisfaction that he had done something important for his people. That night, for the first time in three years, Jacob prayed. He prayed that God would allow Simcha and Paul to stay alive until their part of the plan had been accomplished.

He decided that escape for the purpose of personal freedom should take second priority to escape for a purpose of the general good. For example, escape to give the Allies critical information about the Nazi genocide was an act of much greater value than escape for personal freedom. This became Jacob's choice project in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In this gambit, Jacob found willing friends in Paul Feldman and Simcha Baruch. Paul's mind was steadily degrading. He trembled all of the time. It was clear that his hold upon reality was tenuous at best. It was only a matter of time until he would be caught crying during performances for the prisoners selected for the gas chamber. Yet, Paul had a quick mind for memorization. He could quickly grasp fact upon fact. He was resoundingly successful in memorizing details. And, despite his persistent anxiety, he had courage. Plus, he was reasonably strong. He would be able to walk many kilometers through forest and countryside, if necessary. Therefore, Jacob selected Paul for escape. However, the method for escape had yet to be created.

Chapter 51

Escape From Auschwitz

At 6:30 on the morning of November 18, 1944, Rachael Silverman walked into Auschwitz-Birkenau through the south gate. Her heart was racing and her face was bright red. Although there were no train tracks through this camp entrance, there was a wrought-iron gate over which were the words “Arbeit Macht Frei.” As Rachael handed the guard her papers, she mentally spat at the Nazis for their vile deception.

Rachael had to distract the guard, before he could see that the girl in the identification paper picture was not Rachael. Her full attention was soon upon the face of the guard. He was a young man, possibly eighteen or nineteen years old. His thin face was rosy red and he appeared too young to shave. This worked in her favor. She quickly unbuttoned the top of her blouse, exposing her ample, attractive breasts. The young guard glanced at Rachael, in a sleepy, offhand manner. When he saw Rachael’s beauty, his eyes opened wide and he and smiled at her. Rachael had hoped for a swift entrance and exit from the camp. She loosely met the description of the Polish woman who agreed to help in return for assistance with an escape. The identification papers were in order and current. Rachael thought now how courageous this woman is. She vowed to do her part to help the woman escape. As she had hoped, the guard continued to stare at her breasts while returning her identity papers to her hands. She smiled nervously and slowly walked in.

At the same time, the guard’s superior officer arrived. Upon seeing the officer, the guard’s smile disappeared and he motioned Rachael to quickly go through the checkpoint. The officer’s arrival was fortuitous. Moving quickly to the administration building, Rachael began to work the duties of the Polish woman. She moved from office to office, pretending to dust furniture, while reading every document that she could see. She used a small camera to take pictures of many documents. In fact, she had to change the film four times. The more that Rachael read, the more furious she became. She understood that Auschwitz was a death camp. But, she did not anticipate the vast scale of the killing. Some of the documents corroborated the death of tens of thousands of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and political prisoners. With each new piece of evidence, Rachael became increasingly horrified. She had assumed that thousands of Jews were being killed in this terrible place. Now, she saw that hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of innocent people had been gassed or shot here. There was no evidence that they remained alive. Quite the contrary, the word *deceased* appeared next to almost all of the names. She noticed that some of the prisoners had been selected as slave labor for the camp and the nearby factories. Rachael prayed that Jacob and Moshe’s names were on that list. Some of the papers revealed the names of the companies benefiting from this source of slave labor,

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although they apparently paid a fee to the Germans. The records also indicated that Polish laborers were available, but those had to be paid. The Jewish laborers were free.

Rachael found new Nazi terror in each office, as she was able to rifle through file cabinets and examine papers upon desks. It was a terrifying experience. In one office, she saw a list of hundreds of names of camp prisoners. They were selected for movement to Barracks 21. Rachael wondered what that meant, but made a mental note to remember it.

Wandering from room to room and from building to building, Rachael looked desperately for Jacob. She became increasingly desperate. She skipped her scheduled lunch to continue searching. She went to the infirmary. Many physicians were there, but not Moshe. As she stood near the Infirmary doorway, with sweat running down her face, she began to cry. She realized that they might both be dead. She had pushed that fear away day after day. But here, in this horrible place, the thought of their mortality had taken on a more sinister and realistic nature. *Am I too late?*

Throughout the afternoon, Rachael ran back and forth from the main camp to Birkenau. She saw construction at the newest camp, but it was heavily guarded. In Birkenau, she ran from barracks to barracks and from room to room. Most of the camp was empty, the prisoners working elsewhere. Jacob was nowhere to be found. By mid-afternoon, Rachael was a bundle of nerves and exhausted from running through the camp. Although there was no record of Jacob so far, she felt deeply in her soul that he was still alive. In fact, she was consumed by it.

Despite the cool temperatures, Rachael continued to perspire heavily as she ran from building to building. Her long black hair hung about her shoulders in ragged, damp curls. Glancing at her watch, she saw that her shift was almost over. It was 3:25. Her pass was stamped "A" for the morning or day shift. Employees working a different shift had to have written permission to be in the camp. Rachael had none. She began to panic. She had finally searched every building that was unlocked. But Jacob was nowhere to be found. She finally returned to Auschwitz I, exhausted and despondent. There was only one place left to search. Rachael was desperate as she flung open the door to the commissary. *But why would he be in a place like this?*

Chapter 52

Reunion

Jacob sat in the back of the dusty commissary, perspiring. The orchestra members were coming back from break. Jacob had struggled with some of the music they were playing and was going over it in his mind. He absently noticed an emaciated young boy enter the commissary. The boy was overloaded with logs and pieces of wood for the fireplace. The poor child was struggling to keep his large load of firewood from falling. Jacob felt sorry for him. He barely noticed as a small piece of dark wood, about the same color as the wooden floor of the commissary, fell from the boy's pile as he entered. The child walked on to the fireplace, leaving the small fragment of wood on the floor, near the doorway. Jacob wondered in an offhand manner how much longer the poor child would be allowed to live. That thought was depressing, so Jacob tried to think of something else. Music always cheered him up.

Jacob was now playing the first violin part. He had recently been promoted to the *Concertmaster* position. He was grateful, although it was more challenging than he had anticipated. The orchestra was currently practicing Mozart's *Symphonia Concertante in E-flat*, which included some very difficult passages for first violin and first viola. The composition also made Jacob think about Rachael, who played the viola part quite well. His mind drifted back to 1939. Rachael and Jacob had just discovered their passion for each other. After school, Rachael walked to Jacob's apartment and they played music together. They had played the harmonic first parts of this very composition on several occasions. It seemed like a lifetime ago. Jacob smiled as he recalled sitting next to Rachael on his bed.

Finally, the conductor reappeared, fussed with his music and clicked the podium with his baton several times. The orchestra members shuffled their music and prepared to begin again. The idle chatter was reduced to a low murmur.

Suddenly, Jacob was overcome with a strong foreboding feeling. At first, he felt general anxiety. But there was no specific source for it. *Something is going to happen*. He began to perspire and the hair on the back of his neck stood up. The last time that he had felt this sort of premonition was just before he and his friends had been attacked by the young Nazis after school. His heart was now pounding faster. He tried to shake the awful feeling, but it returned. Then, a voice emerged from behind and to his right.

"I'd give anything if I could just walk away from this place." It was his dear friend, Paul. He was in his usual cello position, in the row behind the second and third part violins. "Jacob, I would run away as fast as possible and never look back." Jacob, unable to shake off the feeling of trepidation, had no desire for conversation. Still, it would be rude to ignore Paul. He finally forced himself to respond. "Well, Paul, you have about as much chance to run away from here

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today as you have of being elected Chancellor of Germany.” He could hear Paul chuckling from behind. “And, exactly where would you go?” added Jacob.

There was blessed silence for a moment. Jacob wondered if Paul would drop the subject. But Paul had no such intention. He continued talking to Jacob from behind. “I’d go to Australia. Of course, I’d have to learn English. But it’s not a bad place for Jews.” Jacob mumbled a reply. “They have quotas, Paul. Just like all the other countries that refused to give us permission to enter.” Jacob used the ensuing silence to try to comprehend this feeling of suspense. He was certain that something was about to happen. Ever since his dream about working in a fiery crematorium, Jacob had taken his feelings and hunches very seriously.

“How about South Africa, Jacob? I heard that they have no quotas for Jews. Have you heard that Jacob?” Jacob was deep in thought and was angry at the interruption. “I don’t know, Paul,” he replied.

Then, after a moment of silence, Paul spoke again, excitedly. “I’ve got it, Jacob! I would go to Palestine! After all, it is our traditional homeland. It’s our promised land.” Jacob was weary of this conversation. Still, he did not wish to be rude to his companion. “You would have to fight the Arabs there, Paul.”

Paul thought this over for a moment, and then replied in a deep, firm voice. “I’d rather fight poorly armed Arabs than the entire German armed forces.” Paul laughed. He waited for Jacob to laugh, but heard nothing.

Jacob was deep in thought. Paul’s comment about Palestine struck a nerve in Jacob’s mind. Like a nagging toothache, it both irritated and demanded attention. One thought quickly led to another. Jacob’s mind was now reeling. *What if some of us survive this genocide? Where would we go? The Europeans hate us. The Russians hate us. Virtually every other free country has limitations on Jewish immigration. But there is British-controlled Palestine. This thought burned deeply in Jacob’s mind. He recalled his vivid dream about walking next to a mountain overlooking a vast desert – one side green, the other brown. Did my dream take place in Palestine? Is that land of my future? Could Jews actually create a homeland there?* He wondered if there would ever be such a special place in the world – a homeland for Jews. It seemed impossible. *Yet, the land called Palestine has been a Jewish homeland in the past. Why not again in the future?*

Just then, he heard Paul’s voice again. “I’ll just bet that you...” Paul stopped in mid-sentence and stood up. He moved to the empty seat next to Jacob. When he saw Jacob’s face, he was shocked. Jacob looked like he was at death’s doorway. He was pale as a ghost. Perspiration was dripping from his head and neck. His eyes stared into space.

Looking down, Paul saw that Jacob’s hands were trembling. “My God Jacob, what’s wrong? You look terrible. Are you sick?” Paul instinctively put his hand on Jacob’s forehead to see if he had a fever. Jacob swiped it away in anger.

He immediately felt bad about it. “I’m sorry Paul. I didn’t mean that.” But Jacob was still deeply concerned about his trepidation.

The room grew noisy again as orchestra players practiced their parts and the old conductor thumbed through pages of music. There was a dizzying array

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of people playing various portions of the first movement. Jacob spoke to Paul in a whisper. “Paul, something’s wrong. Something is going to happen. I’ve had feelings like this before and something has always followed them. I just can’t shake it.” Paul put his arm over Jacob’s shoulders. He could feel Jacob trembling. “I’m sorry Paul. I don’t mean to frighten you. But, I...” Jacob’s voice trailed away into silence before he was able to complete the sentence. Standing up, he mumbled, “Oh my God, it’s happening now!”

At that precise moment, the steps outside the commissary squeaked and moaned as someone stood upon them and approached the doorway. Jacob and Paul stared at the doorknob, watching it turn slowly – first in one direction, then the other.

Slowly, Rachael pushed open the door and entered the commissary. The huge room was mostly empty, except for a small group of musicians practicing on the far side. A small piece of firewood was on the floor, near her right shoe. She walked past it, her right shoe moving it slightly towards the middle of the entranceway. Rachael instantly recognized the Mozart piece and smiled as she recalled playing it with Jacob. It reminded her of the excitement she felt when they sat next to each other on his bed. The room smelled musty.

Rachael thought about how much Jacob had grown to love playing violin. At Theresienstadt, his skill soared to unanticipated heights. It was as though he had been born again. His devotion to a career in medicine seemed to fade away as he learned how to play advanced violin from some of the best talent in Europe. Was it possible that he could be here, in the orchestra? Her heart began to race. In the dark, dusty distance, she saw a very thin man with short dark hair holding a violin. Her pounding heart suddenly jumped into her throat. The man looked somewhat like Jacob! But this man looked older and was much, much thinner. In fact, he was emaciated. His skin hung upon his bones. His face was ridiculously thin. He looked ill, with a sallow complexion. Still, he so much resembled Jacob! If only she could see his eyes. Then, she would know. She took a few tenuous steps toward the orchestra, in the back of the room.

Suddenly, the man who was holding the violin stood up. He was squinting his eyes in her direction. Slowly, he picked up a cane, stood up and began limping towards her. A sudden thought exploded in Rachael’s mind. *Jacob’s leg was injured during our failed mission!* Like thunder, this thought echoed through her energized mind. Another man stood up and followed the man who resembled Jacob. *Could it really be him?* Rachael’s heart was racing now. She could hear the blood rushing through her ears, into her head. For a moment, she wondered if her heart might explode in her chest.

Jacob watched the dark-haired woman walk in. Her right foot brushed against the small piece of firewood that the boy had dropped near the door. The fragment of wood jumped up and briefly spun in the air before it fell again near the doorway. She never noticed it. Jacob continued to stare at the beautiful young woman and he dropped the music that he was holding. It fluttered to the floor in different directions. *Who is that beautiful, dark haired woman standing at the doorway?* His heart seemed to stop for a moment, and then leaped up into his throat, pounding harder than ever before. The woman’s long dark hair and

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shapely figure reminded him instantly of Rachael. *Could that be my beloved wife, standing at the doorway? Or, am I dreaming?* His heart was pounding so hard that his chest hurt. He strained his eyes to see the woman. Slowly, the rest of the orchestra stopped their chatting and stared at her.

Paul watched in amazement as Jacob dropped his cane and limped towards the door, faster with each step. Meanwhile, the woman at the doorway had stopped dead in her tracks. She squinted, attempting to recognize the thin man hobbling in her direction. But there was no certainty upon her face. She was puzzled. As she moved slightly backwards, she kicked the small piece of wood again. This time, it landed directly front of the doorway.

Rachael knew that this hopelessly emaciated and crippled man resembled Jacob. Still, she had never imagined that Jacob could look so bad. She inched forward, still staring into the poor man's face. It was dark in the commissary. His head had recently been shaved. She just couldn't tell. Then, as he approached her, she looked into his eyes. The thin man's eyes told her that this crippled, gaunt prisoner was her beloved husband.

Rachael ran to Jacob, with tears now brimming over her eyes. They met in the center of the commissary. It was a moment frozen in time, for both of them. They kissed, as though it was their first kiss. Time slowed to a stop, as the room spun around them. They touched each other's faces in tender recognition. Tears poured from their eyes and ran down their faces. They kissed each other's faces with intense passion. As they cried, their bodies heaved and shuddered together. Hearts pounding, the lovers met once more in a passionate embrace.

Jacob was stunned. He was tenuous. *Is this a dream?* He instantly noticed everything about Rachael. Her beautiful dark hair fell in ringlets around her face, framing her in a perfect silhouette. She looked more beautiful than ever to him. She was thinner than he remembered, but still ever so beautiful. Their kisses lasted a very long time, while members of the orchestra gathered in a circle around them. Finally, Rachael was able to speak in whispered excitement. "Oh Jacob, my love, I've missed you so much. I'm sorry that it took so long to get here."

At first, she hardly recognized Jacob. He looked ill and much older. His complexion was gray and sallow. His skin had a yellowish tinge. It hung over his bones, as though his muscles had largely disappeared. He grinned at her and she was horrified to see that some of his teeth were missing. The dark circles under his eyes and his emaciated condition made him look like a walking skeleton. Still, Rachael loved him beyond measure. She held him so tight that, after some time, he found it difficult to breathe. Finally, he was compelled to break away or risk falling unconscious. After they kissed and touched each other's faces in recognition, they simply held each other in loving embrace. It was an embrace that had been lost for far too long.

"What about our baby," asked Jacob? Suddenly, Rachael's smile disappeared. *Is something wrong?*

"Oh my," Rachael replied. She frowned, thinking carefully about what to say. Jacob, meanwhile, studied Rachael's expressions. Then, she smiled and whispered in Jacob's ear. "You have a son. I named him Anton, after our fearless

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leader.” After a brief moment of silence, Jacob smiled at her. “Jacob, he saved my life more than once.” But Rachael’s smile was weak and tentative.

Jacob was certain that she was hiding something. “Where is he?” asked Jacob.

“He’s with close friends of Anton’s relatives, in a farm house about three hundred kilometers from here,” she replied. Jacob had a hundred questions about the baby. Yet, it somehow felt like the wrong time to ask. Instead, he smiled and continued to kiss Rachael’s face. He was losing himself in the moment. It was like a dream to end all dreams. Rachael’s embrace and kisses were like water to a man dying of thirst. Jacob was in heaven. *She is life and love and everything good in the world, all at the same time.*

Rachael stopped kissing long enough to ask about Moshe. “Jacob, where are your parents? Are they still alive?” Jacob pulled back for a moment. His mother’s death was still too fresh and painful.

“My mother was killed the day we arrived here. An evil Nazi doctor decided that she was too frail to work hard. So, he sent her to the gas chamber.” Jacob looked down and paused. “My father is alive. The Nazis are forcing him to work in the infirmary. I saw him last about three months ago. Rachael, he looked terrible. I’ve never seen him so ill. He told me that he had not been asked to kill or hurt anyone. They had him doing autopsies and helping sick patients.” He had to pause again, in order to control his emotions. “He told me that he would kill himself before he would hurt someone on the orders of a Nazi.” Rachael felt Jacob’s pain and put her arms around his neck. “Oh God, Rachael,” he continued. “I don’t think he’ll live much longer. I don’t know how to save him and I’m afraid that I will never see him again.” The tears arrived and Jacob had to stop.

Jacob noticed Paul, standing a few feet away. He had folded his arms over his chest to watch. Jacob pulled away. “Oh, I’m sorry. Rachael, this is my good friend Paul Feldman.” Rachael gave Paul a glance and offered a hand to him. The other hand was wound tightly around Jacob’s waist, in an iron grip. Her lover had been lost to her for far too long. She was not about to let him go again.

Jacob smiled at Rachael, and then frowned. “My love, it’s too dangerous here. How did you gain entrance? Is someone with you? What’s the plan?” Rachael was again consumed with kissing Jacob’s face. Her kisses were like life itself. His greatest desire was for Rachael’s lips to press upon his forever. They grasped each other tightly and kissed each other’s face, in a passion never before experienced. Jacob thought that his pounding heart would burst through his rib cage at any moment. *Is this a dream? Am I dreaming? How could my beloved wife suddenly appear before me?* Jacob was still excited from the adrenaline of the moment. *So many times, I have been near death. Each time, all that I could think about was Rachael.* Now, with Rachael in his arms, he questioned his own sanity. *Am I dreaming? Am I sane? Can this be real?* Jacob could only repeat this question in his mind while Rachael smothered his face with warm, wet kisses.

After several more minutes of kissing, Rachael stopped to speak. When she spoke, she whispered quietly. “Jacob, my sweet, sweet love, I came here to take you out. We need a witness to the mass killings. We need someone to tell

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the Allies what is happening here, so that they may bomb it to tiny pieces.” Rachael whispered this in hushed, quiet tones. “Please, we must hurry to the main gate. The employees are lining up already. Hurry!” This last part was in annoyance, as Jacob and Paul stared at her, motionless.

Just then, the siren sounded, signaling the end of the day shift. Its sorrowful wailing shocked Jacob and Paul out of their silence. Contract employees had only two minutes to clear the camp after the siren. Most of the employees from outside the camp had already lined up near the main gate or the south gate. They hated the camp so much that they counted the minutes until they could leave. But now, Rachael was far away from any of the camp gates. Her speech became more animated and urgent. “We must run to make it out in time,” cried Rachael. It will take five minutes to reach the gate, even if we are running. Look at this,” exclaimed Rachael as she took out the camp pass for the Polish woman’s husband. “This will allow you to leave the camp! My love, please listen to me. We must go out now!”

Jacob ran to his seat and grasped the portfolio that he carried with him everywhere. Only then did he notice that the entire orchestra was staring at him. They too had been overcome with emotion. There was not a dry eye in the room. Jacob waved good-bye to his friends. He turned to Paul, with his hand out. They shook hands and then hugged each other for a moment. “You know, Paul, you should be going. You know more about the camps than me.” Paul laughed for a moment. “So, you want me to go with your wife?” The room erupted in laughter. “Well, perhaps you should take the next cab,” said Jacob.

At the doorway, Jacob stood to say a final farewell to this place of death and torture. He looked at the orchestra members and smiled. Each of them had come to be his friend. His heart now pounded with delight and anticipation. *Am I really escaping this place of horror?* He thought about all of the suffering he had experienced. He thought about his father, who still suffered as a prisoner. His mother had been killed here. Jacob shifted the violin and its contents into his left arm, so that he could wave good-bye to his friends. Unfortunately, the violin prevented Jacob from seeing the floor beneath him – and the small piece of firewood that Rachael had inadvertently kicked into the center of the doorway. He swiveled to leave, moving the violin into his right arm. As he began walking through the doorway, he thought that he heard Paul calling his name, and something like “look out.”

Indeed, someone screamed, “Jacob!” But it was too late. Jacob had already turned to leave. Without seeing the danger, Jacob placed his left foot directly on top of the small piece of firewood. His left leg slipped upon the piece of wood and his damaged knee twisted awkwardly. Jacob’s poorly healed tendons could not bear the stress. His anterior cruciate ligament tore away from the bone that held it in place. Instantly overcome with a wave of terrible pain, Jacob fell to the floor. The small piece of wood spun into a dark corner. Jacob’s left leg was now completely useless. He screamed in agony as orchestra members crowded around him. Instantly, Paul and Rachael were at his side.

Grasping his knee in both hands, Jacob tried to collect himself. The pain was terrible. He knew that he would not be able to walk out from the camp. He

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would not be able to walk anywhere for some time. Everyone stared at him in horror. Finally, Jacob looked into Paul's eyes and spoke in a strained, hoarse voice. "You must go in my place."

Rachael gasped in fear. "No," she cried. Jacob grasped the nearby violin case and handed it to Paul.

Jacob put his arms around Rachael's neck and kissed her lips softly. "Rachael, you must be brave now. There will be another time for us. But, now you must take this information to the Allied commanders. Show them the horror that the Nazis have perpetrated upon so many innocent people. This is even more important than we are, my sweet love." He kissed her tears away, one by one. Then, he kissed her lips passionately. "Whatever happens, my love, I will never forget you."

Rachael stared at Jacob in abject horror. She was terrified. *God, how can you do this to me? How can I lose my beloved Jacob again? We do not deserve this!* Her eyes told Jacob that this new arrangement was impossible to grasp. "Jacob, I've gone through hell to find you. Now, here you are – barely alive in this death camp! I cannot leave without you!" They wrapped themselves together and kissed with more passion than ever before. Finally, Jacob pulled back and looked into Rachael's eyes. He tried to speak, but could not seem to find his voice. Never had so much emotion flowed through Jacob's mind. It felt like electricity was passing through his brain. Finally, Jacob managed to produce a scratchy voice, with tears overflowing his own eyes. "Now, go my love! We will be together again!"

Rachael knelt on the floor next to her beloved husband. Her mind was spinning out of control. She thought that her heart was about to pound through her chest. *How can God be so cruel?* It took all of her cunning and bravery to come into this terrible place. She had found her husband in deplorable condition, barely alive. She must save him! Rachael could not bear to leave Jacob. Not like this. Her mind was reeling. Tears streamed down her face. *What if he can't survive until I come back? After all, healthy people don't live long here.* Her voice was halting, between hitches of her rib cage. "Jacob, you are my witness. Come with me now!" Then, slowly, Jacob lifted his trousers until his left knee was completely visible. Although there were no scars from surgery, the left knee wobbled and jutted out in an inappropriate direction. It was sickening. Jacob grimaced in pain. Looking at the knee wobble was nauseating. Rachael jerked her head back, uncontrollably. It broke her heart to see him so disabled. Now, so badly injured, she wondered if he could stay alive much longer.

"Rachael and Paul... please come closer. Paul, give me my violin case." Jacob made them come close, so that no one else could hear. He spoke in a whisper. "Rachael, I have a great deal of information for you to take to the Allies. He opened his violin case. The inside covering was red velvet. Jacob slowly pulled away the velvet covering over the bottom of the case. Soon it came apart, revealing Jacob's prize. Inside this hiding place, Jacob had stored all of the collective information about Auschwitz that he had been able to obtain during the prior year. Jacob's cache included original blueprint drawings, with "crematoria" written over buildings where bodies were to be burned. He had collected

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railroad disposition papers, including dozens of schedules marked "special treatment," from other camps and holding areas. Some of the trains were marked as "Jewish" or "Jew." There were sheets that had been ripped from accounting ledgers. They showed prisoner names, numbers, dispositions, work detail and status. The "status" for most of the names was "expired," or "deceased."

The documents proved that the Nazis were killing Jews, and others, on a massive scale. It was also clear from this evidence that some Jews were allowed to survive so that they could be forced into slave labor. Some of the papers showed prisoners assigned to labor at many of the factories near the camp – with no wages paid by the employer. Even the employers were listed, including I. G. Farben and Bayer. There were memos and pictures showing doctors experimenting upon prisoners. Page after page revealed wicked, twisted experiments upon innocent prisoners. They had been beaten, frozen, boiled and stabbed. They had poison gas injected into their veins and were strapped down while internal organs were removed without the benefit of anesthesia. Finally, there were at least a dozen pictures from one of the crematoria. The pictures showed skeletal prisoners shoving naked bodies into a large furnace opening. One of the pictures, taken while the oven was down for ash removal, showed part of a human skeleton inside the furnace opening.

Rachael became nauseous and had to turn away in disgust. She retched and almost threw up. Others who were close enough to see the pictures gasped in horror. The pictures were nothing less than first-hand evidence of Nazi atrocities. It was exactly the evidence that the Allies needed.

"How did you get these?" Rachael's mouth was still open as she stared at the pictures.

"I know many people here, Rachael. I asked them to help me. A few resisted. But when I said that this evidence could help the Allies put a stop to the killings, everyone cooperated. No one wanted to push innocent infants, children or mothers into the gas chambers any longer than necessary – even if bombing the camp meant their own death. Rachael, there are so many brave people here. But we are all dying. Some people died just to gather this evidence. No one can live on what they feed us here. Every day, dozens die just from starvation or malnutrition. There is disease everywhere. As you can see from this evidence, terrible medical experiments are performed here. They operate on prisoners without use of anesthesia. They inject prisoners with all manner of horrible things. My father helped me to collect this information. Meanwhile, you and Paul must leave with this evidence."

Rachael stopped in her tracks and stared at Jacob. Her eyes were suddenly wide open with fear. "But I have arranged for you to escape with me, Jacob." The terror of the situation was now appearing upon her face. Her eyebrows arched upward and her lips began to quiver. "No!" Rachael began screaming at Jacob. "No! Come with me now. You are my husband! You cannot stay here. Look, I can help you walk out. Please just get up and walk out with me!" Then, the tears arrived. No matter how hard she tried, Rachael could not stop crying. She hugged Jacob so hard that it became difficult to breathe. Rachael's tears fell across Jacob's cheeks, mingling with his own. She looked at Paul, who could

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only shrug his shoulders. Jacob looked at her and nodded his head.

Jacob grasped Rachael's face in his hands and whispered to her softly. "My sweet and everlasting love, know that you will always be in my heart. You are my life, my home and my hope. But I am now a cripple. I can no more escape with you than I can run in the Olympics. No one would hire a cripple. Not even the Nazis. Even if we made it past the gate, I would slow you down. In a firefight, I would be useless. I cannot go with you now, my love."

Rachael broke down in tears. Her body heaved heavily with each pained breath. How could this happen, Rachael wondered. How could she struggle beyond measure to find her beloved Jacob, yet not be able to leave with him? "Oh God, this is far too much," she exclaimed between sobs. "Jacob, I cannot leave you again!"

Jacob pulled Rachael's face close to his, gently stroking her soft, shiny, dark hair. He tenderly kissed her tears and wiped them from her face. "Rachael, you are my everlasting love. If it is God's will, we will be together again. Somehow, I know that we will find a way. But right now, you have a job to do. If I went along, I would endanger the success of your mission. So, you must go this time with Paul. There will be another time for me." Jacob glanced at Paul as he said this. Paul acknowledged Jacob's confidence with a wry smile.

Jacob handed Paul the documents and pictures, folded carefully back into the hidden compartment inside the violin case. He shook Paul's hand with both of his hands. "Thank you, my friend. And... good luck." Jacob then turned to Rachael. He held her face in his hands. "Go now with Paul. Accomplish your mission. The mission is far more important than any of us now. Remember that I will always love you. I believe that we have a future. Please, take care of our little Anton. I would love to hold him in my arms. My dear, our love will last forever. Good-bye."

Rachael and Paul looked at each other. Suddenly, the mournful sound of the siren announced that the second shift was beginning. Rachael wiped away her tears, grabbed the portfolio and Paul's left arm. "Let's go!" she screamed. Paul snapped to attention and ran behind Rachael. Rachael turned at the doorway and looked behind, but Jacob was still on the floor, staring at the ceiling.

They ran as fast as their legs could carry them to the nearest gate. Rachael's tears continued to flow down her cheeks as she ran. Leaving Jacob behind in this death camp was the most difficult thing she had ever done. Her heart was aching for him as she ran. Yet, something deep inside told her that she would see Jacob again. Finally, they reached the North gate. This gate was not used as frequently and, therefore, had fewer guards. As they approached the gate, only one guard was visible. When they arrived breathless, the guard stopped them. Well beyond the gate, they saw a long line of workers walking home. They were late. Now, the guard would be suspicious. But, for some unknown reason, only one guard was posted at a gate where three guards should have been. Finally, thought Rachael, some luck is on our side. Perhaps it was a good omen. Had she tried to leave from the main gate, at least three or four guards would have confronted them, in addition to the guards posted above the gate in the nearby watchtower.

"Stop where you are! What's that you're carrying?" asked the short guard

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with a grizzled appearance. The guard looked back and forth between Paul and Rachael. He had a pockmarked face, likely the result of a lost war against adolescent acne. He smelled of liquor, needed a shave and looked as though he might be drunk. When she drew close, Rachael could smell alcohol on his foul breath. She mentally called this guard "Schmutz," the Yiddish word for "dirt." Instinctively, she protected the portfolio by pulling it close to her chest. This only provoked more interest by the unkempt German. "What have you got there?" They tussled over the portfolio briefly. Finally, with a show of strength, the guard yanked it away. Rachael and Paul stood frozen. They had been caught!

Rachael felt her heart pounding heavily in her chest. *I'm about to get caught spying against the Nazis. There was no trial for those who conspired against the Third Reich. I'll probably be shot in the head. That would be a merciful death. Let them kill me. It's better than a slow death in this hideous place. And, it's better than living my life without Jacob. Nothing they can do will change my love for Jacob.*

All the while, Paul was as still as the ground he was standing upon. He looked back and forth for the other guard. Paul's despondent face told Rachael that he had given up all hope. She wondered if he now wished that Jacob were in his place. They were at the mercy of this inept, drunken German.

Schmutz, the inebriated guard who had snatched the critical portfolio, wavered on his feet. The pupils of his eyes were dilated and his breath was putrid with some kind of alcohol. As he fumbled into the contents of the portfolio, many pages of music appeared. Thankfully, Jacob encased the Nazi records and pictures within several pages of music – for this very reason. He had anticipated a potential search by Nazi guards. Much of the evidence was wrapped inside books and pages of music. Unless they were very thorough, it would appear that the contents were pages and pages of music. Rachael marveled at how Jacob had anticipated this very possibility, and had used his music to hide the invaluable evidence below. The impatient guard became quickly agitated over this absence of contraband. He seemed angry.

Rachael decided to change the mood. She surreptitiously unbuttoned the top two buttons of her blouse. Despite her pregnancy, Rachael's body was curvaceous and enticing. "Do you read music?" She was successful in gaining the guard's attention. She batted her eyes and flirted with him. He stared at her exposed chest. Schmutz suddenly smiled at her. He started to close the portfolio. Then, suddenly, he reopened it. This time, some of the official German documents were visible. Rachael froze. Instinctively, she unbuttoned her blouse further, exposing her ample breasts until her nipples were exposed. The guard smiled and reached out to her, but stumbled against the nearby guard post. His inebriation was impressive, she thought. *This fool can barely stand up.*

In danger of losing his balance, the guard shoved the portfolio back into Rachael's grateful arms. He grasped the guard-post edge for balance and burped loudly. "Get out of here!" The guard was wavering on his feet. "And next time, don't be late in leaving." He barked at them as they quickly rushed through the gate, and into freedom. Rachael and Paul walked as fast as possible, without attracting undue attention. From the top of a nearby hill, Rachael looked back at the

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gate. She saw that the other guard had arrived. He pushed Schmutz back to his post, straightening his uniform. From the distance, she could hear the guard yelling at his inept companion. His drunkenness had saved Rachael and Paul... and gave the Allies all of the evidence they required to bomb the camp. They ran through the forest until their sides hurt and they could run no longer.

In the commissary, Jacob tried to stand and bear weight on his left leg. He fell again. The pain was horrendous. As his orchestral friends tried to help him to his feet, he told them to be quiet. With Rachael and Paul escaping, he was listening for the sound of gunshots or the camp siren, signaling an escape attempt. He prayed silently for their successful escape. And while Jacob now entertained no real hope for his own survival, he needed to know that Rachael and the baby would be safe. "God, please help them," he murmured. *At least allow my dear wife and sweet, innocent baby to avoid this ghastly death.*

Jacob knew that there would be hell to pay if the Germans could not account for a missing prisoner. The Nazis would sometimes kill everyone in a barracks if even one person there had escaped. They assumed it would discourage future escape attempts. So, Jacob had to arrange for Paul's "replacement."

Simcha, along with all of his old barracks-mates, had been forced to work in the crematorium. They had become Sonderkommando. During a pause in activity, Simcha took a body that was similar in age and size to Paul and eradicated its tattoo numbers. He did this by burning the left forearm. After dark, they smuggled the body into Paul's barracks. The following morning, the kapos in charge of Paul's barracks reported him as deceased. Although Jacob feared that someone would report the hoax, he heard nothing about it again. His scheme had worked perfectly. Jacob had correctly assumed that the barracks kapos would fear any reprisals from the Germans if they reported an escape, or even if they reported a "strange" occurrence, such as a dead prisoner with one arm mysteriously burned. Yes, thought Jacob, even the Nazi guards feared the reprisal for reporting anything that was out of the ordinary.

Jacob was also amazed at how providential it was to have Simcha working in the right place at the right time. Sadly, Simcha would not live to enjoy their little victory over the Nazis much longer. As scheduled, he and his crematoria crew were shot two weeks later. The next crew of prisoners burned Simcha's body, with the others. But Jacob made sure to have one last meeting with Simcha, to tell him that his pictures of the crematoria were outside the camp and on their way to the Allies. "Yes," he told Simcha, "Your death may be one of the last here, because of your courage to take those pictures."

Simcha smiled his soft, gentle smile. His wrinkled, dirty face now seemed so relaxed. He knew that his time had come and he accepted it with grace and dignity. His last comment to Jacob was stunning and somewhat frightening. Simcha pulled Jacob into his large, barreled chest and hugged him. Jacob could smell death all over Simcha's body. It was that sickly-sweet smell, like burned meat – yet not quite the same. Simcha whispered into Jacob's right ear. "You are here for a reason, Jacob. You know that, don't you?"

Yes, Jacob had to admit that he felt the same strange pull on his mind. Since his family left Theresienstadt, Jacob had felt certain that he was supposed

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to do something important. He believed that all that he had learned and all of his feelings and experiences were leading him to a singular point of action. He grasped the reality of this existence, finally accepting that he could be a leader of men. He *had* to be a leader. This was his destiny. His people, his wife and his family had been tormented beyond reason. His mother was dead, a victim of Nazi atrocities. His father and his wife and child might also soon be dead. It seemed as though the Germans would kill every prisoner, whether they won or lost the war. Jacob now accepted that he must live to lead whatever remained of his people. And he believed that the time for his leadership would arrive soon. After that, his own death meant nothing. Still gazing into Simcha's impossibly blue eyes, Jacob smiled. "Yes, Simcha. I have finally accepted that I have been called into service here. Somehow, I must stay alive. But, Simcha, you also are a very important player in this larger-than-life drama. Your courage in taking those pictures may save hundreds of thousands of deaths. It would take months, perhaps years for the Nazis to rebuild this camp. Even so, the Allies could just bomb it again. Because of you, Simcha, more Jews may survive this pogrom than before."

They parted, as Simcha had to return to the Sonderkommando barracks. Jacob cried for hours after leaving him. He had grown to love the big, grizzled older man, whose wit and intellect everyone admired.

During the next few days, Jacob was able to stand and walk. Although he had constant severe pain in his left leg, he was able to continue his position with the orchestra. He continued to play for the ever-increasing number of transit trains, filled with hopeless, innocent victims.

Then, one glorious day in mid-September, one of Jacob's deepest fears became reality. Day after day, Jacob played his beautiful violin for the doomed prisoners, waiting patiently in line for the gas chamber. Jacob long harbored the fear that he would see a close friend or loved-one in line. It never happened, until this perfect autumn afternoon.

The late afternoon sun was a low angle, due to the shortened daylight of the season. The day had been mild, with a gentle westerly breeze. Bees buzzed around the orchestra stand, eager to use the last warmth of the day to gather more pollen. A long, winding line of new prisoners patiently waited in silence for their turn to die. As the line neared the orchestra stand, the prisoners occasionally looked up at the musicians. For months, Jacob had stopped looking at the prisoners as they passed by. Their faces haunted his dreams as it was, especially the children. Yet, for some reason, Jacob looked up at the line just in time to see a familiar figure. He was a tall, thin man, about Jacob's age. The poor man was limping badly and could stand up barely with a crutch. But, he had a hauntingly familiar shape and face. The tall crippled man had a long, pointed nose and large ears; as well as eyes that were too close together.

Suddenly, Jacob's heart skipped a beat. He knew only one person who matched that description. Jacob stopped playing and squinted his eyes. But the man was directly in front of the blazing afternoon sun. Jacob shaded his eyes with his hand. Still, he could not be certain. He stood up, a glaring mistake that could result in being shot. But Jacob was captivated by the man's appearance.

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He prayed that he was mistaken. He begged God that this man was not who he thought he was. Suddenly, the limping man looked up at the orchestra stand and their eyes met. It was his best friend from Salzburg, Hershel Farber.

Hershel saw Jacob upon the orchestra stand. The prisoners were beaten if they spoke aloud. When he was close to the stand, Jacob saw that one side of his trousers had been soaked with blood. Hershel saw Jacob's quizzical expression and pantomimed that he had been shot in the leg. Jacob saw that the damage had been severe. Poor Hershel could barely stand up, even with the crutch. He was in obvious severe pain. Jacob's mind was spinning with terror. *Oh dear God. Not Hershel! No, please God. Not him! Not my best friend! You cannot take him! He saved my life during the synagogue fire! He always tried to protect Rachael. I would not be alive, but for Hershel! Take me instead! Please, God. Take me instead!*

Unable to speak to each other, they gazed deeply into each other's eyes. Tears dripped down Jacob's face as he sorrowfully watched his best friend approach and then move away from the orchestra stand. Hershel pointed to his leg and make a gun "sign" with his hand, indicating that he had been shot. Jacob hoped that Hershel delivered more pain than he received. Yet, it seemed that all captured partisans were sent to the gas chamber.

Jacob continued to risk his own life by standing up. He could not move at all. It was a terribly frightening and painful experience. His heart pounded in his chest. He became nauseous and dizzy. He and Hershel had been more than close friends. They were lifelong comrades. Poor Hershel Farber, who was born unattractive yet had a heart of gold, did not deserve such a cruel fate. Jacob thought about how their lives should have unfolded. They should have been best men at each other's weddings. Their wives should have been close friends. Their children should have played together. They should have died as cranky old men, with a lifetime of wonderful memories to share. It was a heartbreaking experience.

Before he moved away from sight, Hershel mouthed the words, "Rachael is safe." Finally, Hershel moved out of sight completely and entered the gas chamber anteroom. Jacob sank back into his seat, in despair. The news that Rachael was safe washed over him like air to a drowning man. No news could have been as important. Yet, Jacob's heart was broken over the loss of his best friend. He would never see Hershel again. The thought was difficult to accept. Jacob thought that he had become numb to bad news. What could be worse than losing your family, your home, being starved and imprisoned? Yet, Hershel's death hit him like a sledgehammer. For weeks afterward, Jacob was distraught.

The weather turned freezing near the end of November and the icy pattern held Europe in its unforgiving grip for weeks on end. The ubiquitous Nazi parties and dinners, requiring the orchestra, continued. There was an officers' Christmas party requiring music. There was a grand celebration for the German enlisted men in the commissary. And, there was an elegantly catered New Year's Eve party at the Commandant's villa. At each event, Jacob played his violin dutifully. Yet, his mind drifted always to the sad eyes of the incoming prisoners, standing in line for the gas chamber. Those eyes haunted Jacob day and night.

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He walked to and from places in a constant fog. Sometimes, he drifted away during a conversation. It had become common for people to pull upon Jacob's arm, or wave a hand before his eyes. "Wake up Jacob!" they said to him when he drifted. "Pay attention, won't you?" And always Jacob was consumed by the pain of hunger and the anxiety of being a prisoner in a death camp.

New Year's Day 1945 arrived. The Germans had been festive around New Year's Day. It was opportunity to brag about their power and control. Yet, Nazi parties were now subdued. There was no longer a carefree liveliness about the Germans. They seemed increasingly preoccupied.

Each evening, Jacob lay in his bunk thinking about Rachael. One terribly cold night in early January, Jacob shivered in his bunk waiting for sleep to arrive. His mind was focused on Rachael. It had been almost two months since she broke into the camp and left with Paul. Yet, Jacob could still see her face and taste her lipstick. He could still smell her perfume and feel the softness of her hair. His heart ached terribly for her. They were soul mates and they belonged together. Their lives were incomplete apart, leaving a gaping, cold dark place where their tender love once resided. He realized that he had to find a way to be with her again.

At other times, Jacob felt inconsolably despondent. Sometimes, guilt rose to the forefront of his mind. He wondered why so many innocent Jewish lives were obliterated, when he remained alive. It did not seem fair. There were times when Jacob wished for death. During those times, it seemed that nothing was as important. Yet each time he wished for death, he realized that God wanted him to save his chosen people. *Why do I continue to live in this place of abomination, while hundreds of thousands of my fellow Jews have perished? There can be only one reason. God wants me to do something important.*

Suddenly, Jacob realized three critical things simultaneously. He had to understand God's plan. Jacob believed this so deeply that the thought had become part of the fiber of his being. And, whatever it was that God planned for him to do, the time for its action would soon arrive. He knew this to be true because soon there would be no Jews left to kill. Second, he had to find his father and help him stay alive. For this, he required a plan of his own. Finally, the knowledge that Rachael was still alive motivated him to join her. To accomplish this, he had to escape. Jacob's mind was on fire. *I must stop the mental drifting! Every thought must be part of my plan. I must discover what God wants me to do here. I must save my father. I must rejoin my wife and child!*

Jacob tried to numb his mind, but the terrible nightmares gave him no peace and no sleep. As he tried to fall asleep, he saw the faces of the children on their way to the gas chamber. They were so playful and innocent. They had no idea that their lives would end soon. Sometimes the weather was sunny and pleasant. In other dreams, it would be raining or snowing. But, each nightmare began with playful children in line for their inevitable death. Their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins looked on dolefully as the little ones romped their way into demise. Sleep had become a thing of the past to Jacob. At first he lamented his loss of sleep. Later, he rejoiced that he would not have to face those nightmares. But lack of sleep led to more mental drifting. It became almost

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impossible to concentrate.

One day of hunger and torture blended into the next, as Jacob's mind grew less and less active. And while his physical health improved, his mental health deteriorated. Jacob could no longer bear to look at the thousands and thousands of incoming prisoners. He could no longer look upon those families who were about to perish. And, every night, he saw the faces again. The adults walked along in line with sorrowful, downcast eyes. They understood where they were going. They saw the flames and heard the terrifying thunder of the crematoria smokestacks. Jacob understood their austere thoughts. Worse yet, while Jacob watched from the orchestra platform over those about to die, his mind saw their progeny vanish before his eyes.

As Jacob floated in that gray space between waking and dreaming, the full vista of the Nazi horror burst upon his consciousness. *It is not just the terror of killing millions of innocent Jews now! How many millions of Jews will never be born because of Nazi genocide? How many future generations of us will never breathe air, drink water or speak loving words to their parents? These Nazis know what they are doing to the world. They are destroying an entire generation of Jews, as well as the children that they could have had. They have also destroyed our contribution to the future of art, science, music and philosophy. One of them might have developed a cure for cancer, or found a way to stop global hunger. One of them might have become a successful diplomat and stopped a future war. How many innocent Jewish teenagers, like Rachael and I, will not be born and have a chance to fall in love? And, what could our children have done to make the world better for everyone? What gives these Nazis the right to deprive us of a future?*

Meanwhile, the children in line romped and played games with each other, as though they were on holiday. Sometimes the poor Jews would look up at the orchestra as they waited in line for their inevitable death. This Jacob feared the most, for his heart sank deeply as their eyes met. He desperately wanted to tell them to attack the Germans. He wanted to scream at them to take away the Nazis' weapons. After all, there were hundreds of times more prisoners than guards. But, of course, no one attempted to turn the tables upon their captors, who held machine guns. No one wanted to be the first to die. Instead, Jacob watched as hundreds of thousands of his fellow innocent Jews marched obediently into death.

Chapter 53

Fighting Back

At the same time, in the infirmary, Moshe stood hunched over the elevated corpse of an eleven-year-old girl. The body of her identical twin lay upon a nearby stretcher. The room smelled of death, decay and formaldehyde. Surrounding Moshe upon many shelves were dozens and dozens of specimen jars. He shook his head in disgust as he gazed upon display after display of internal organs – all plucked from the healthy, vibrant bodies of innocent children. It seemed to Moshe that the room was a ghastly collection of miscellaneous organs floating in jars – a museum dedicated to inhumanity. Sometimes, after a long day of surgically removing these internal organs, Moshe had imagined hearing them move. Of course, he told himself, they are nothing but dead livers, gall bladders, kidneys and hearts. How could they move on their own? Still, after months of continued mental and emotional torture, anything could happen to his mind – or at least that’s what he believed on some particularly bad days.

Dr. Mengele had personally ordered Moshe to conduct a thorough autopsy on select twins – with specified internal organs to be removed. Day after day, Moshe forced his hands into the abdomen of recently killed innocent children. Most of the children brought to Moshe were Jewish. Only Jewish boys were circumcised. Mengele did not tell Moshe exactly why he was to perform this task. He was told only to examine all body parts and to save all organs listed in the lab.

Moshe lived in chronic, severe depression. Each day was torture. The Nazis had killed his darling Hanna. He had no idea if his beloved Jacob was still alive. The pain of not knowing was a constant source of anguish and distraction. His heart ached for Rachael and he wondered if she and her baby were still alive. Many months ago, he received a scrawled message from Jacob. This lifted his depression temporarily. And, in December, he saw Jacob playing with the orchestra at a holiday concert. But Jews did not live long in this monstrous place. And at that concert, he had barely recognized his own son. Jacob looked like he was at death’s door. And, Moshe saw how badly he had limped on and off the stage in the commissary. With each passing day, he understood that it was less likely that Jacob was still alive. Moshe had no idea how much longer Jacob could remain with the orchestra, or when the Nazis would dismantle the orchestra and destroy its members. So Moshe lived within the confines of the infirmary, waiting to die, to be killed – or to take his own life. Escape no longer entered his mind.

Moshe also had to confront his own likely mortality. His heart disease had advanced significantly. Within a few weeks after entering Auschwitz, Moshe began to experience tightness in his chest associated with stress and exertion. In the months that followed, he was easily out of breath and weak while performing

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mundane physical tasks. As a Jewish member of the medical staff, Moshe's diet was little better than the rank and file prisoners. He had lost a great deal of weight and considered himself borderline malnourished. One of the interesting aspects of being a physician, he always told himself, was the ability to diagnose your own ailments. In this case, Moshe was certain of his advancing cardiovascular disease.

With each passing week, Moshe felt increasingly lethargic and weak. He could no longer walk up a flight of stairs without panting and perspiring. His chest pain was now often accompanied by pain in his left arm and shoulder. Moshe recognized this as a symptom of end-stage coronary artery disease. He understood that his death was near. Still, he was not sad. While the Nazis had not asked him to kill a prisoner – something he swore he would never do – his current duties had become emotionally overwhelming. He asked God to take his life, rather than continue doing the dirty work of these evil men. So, as Moshe's chest pain worsened, he was grateful that his imminent demise would in a small way, damage the Nazi plans. Thus, death had become an inviting destination for Dr. Moshe Silverman. He welcomed it. His only wish was to see his beloved son Jacob one final time.

Suddenly, the door opened and Moshe looked up. It was one of the German doctors – a Dr. Ernst Braun. Braun was difficult to read. He was a bespectacled man of middle age, with a pencil-thin brown mustache. Braun was very quiet. No one knew his thoughts. He wore a Nazi pin with a swastika on his lapel, but was respectful with Jews. To the prisoners, he was an enigma. He cleared his throat before speaking. "Am I interrupting you, Dr. Silverman?" Moshe found it peculiar that Nazis continued to refer to Jewish prisoners as "doctor." They had managed to reduce the Jewish race in Europe to the status of rodents, yet still referred to physicians with respect. Perhaps German physicians held on to such vagaries of perception for their own sake.

"No," replied Moshe. He paused from his work to look at the young German doctor.

Braun continued, "You are ordered to report to the main laboratory tomorrow morning. Dr. Shauenstein will continue with this work here." Braun paused for a moment. His eyes were upon the eleven-year-old twin girls. Braun stared at them for some time. Moshe wondered if the German was sexually excited. He had seen a few of the German doctors become sexually excited over the corpses of beautiful women. One or two of them seemed to be particularly excited over the naked bodies of children. Was Braun one of these *lovers of children*? The thought always made Moshe sick to his stomach. "What's this about, Braun?" Moshe knew that he took a risk each time he asked a question. The Nazis would not hesitate to have you beaten if you asked the wrong question. *Am I to be beaten again?*

Braun was silent for a long time, as he continued to stare at the limp, white body of the girl on the stretcher. Suddenly, he looked up at Moshe, who saw fear on his face. He recognized that something bad was about to happen. "Dr. Heim is coming back tomorrow. You will be assisting him."

Moshe looked puzzled. "And, who – exactly – is Dr. Heim?" Moshe knew

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that he could easily be killed for asking such a question. Most of the Nazi doctors would have had him beaten for “insubordination.” The Nazis considered such questions from Jews as inappropriate. “Jewish doctors should work and not ask stupid questions,” he had once been told. That was almost a year ago. Moshe instinctively looked down at his hands. Mengele had once ordered that Moshe’s left hand be de-nailed for “asking too many questions.” He recalled with horror the agony of having each of the fingernails of his left hand pulled out at the root with pliers. The pain had been incredible. Blood dripped from his damaged hand for days. It later became infected. The fingernails eventually grew back. But, because of his malnutrition, the new nails were yellowish, thin and weak. As he looked down, he saw that he had instinctively hidden his left hand inside of his right hand. They both now trembled.

This time, however, Braun was preoccupied with the dead girl lying just a few feet away. He had no interest in leaving the room just yet. He continued the conversation with Moshe. “Dr. Aribert Heim is a distinguished physician from Austria. He comes here every so often from the other camps.” Suddenly, Braun realized his mistake. Prisoners were never to be told about any of the other camps. He cleared his throat and shuffled his feet. “I mean, he comes here once in a while to work.”

Moshe realized that he would have to pick away at Braun to get his desired information. He walked to the stretcher and pulled the sheet away, exposing the child underneath. Braun gasped. The girl, like her twin upon the table above with her internal organs exposed, was just beginning to develop sexually. Her young breasts poked up from her chest – even in death. A brief thatch of dark pubic hair pushed up in the center of her bony pelvis. *This beautiful young girl should be jumping rope with her friends right now, not lying dead on a stretcher in an inferno of Nazi insanity.* Moshe noticed Braun staring at the girl and was sickened to observe that he was becoming sexually excited. His trousers bulged in front. He heard Braun’s hushed voice saying, “Oh my, the young ones are so beautiful.” His voice trailed away.

Moshe cleared his throat, bringing Braun back into the conversation. He looked up at Moshe with embarrassment. Suddenly, he seemed to realize that he had an erection. Quickly, he covered it with his hands and turned away. “You will be assisting Dr. Heim with some vital experiments.” Braun’s face was red. “Besides, it’s not your place to ask such questions, Jew!” He almost spat out “Jew,” as though the word itself was a contagious disease. Moshe understood when to be silent. Braun quickly left the room, slamming the heavy wooden door behind him.

The next morning, Moshe reported to the lab on time. Inside, he saw his friend Albert Goldman. One glance at Goldman told Moshe that something was very wrong. He gave Moshe a cursory smile that reflected fear. Goldman stood next to a thin, wild-eyed man with jet-black hair. The man wore a bright white lab coat over his wiry frame. As he entered, both men swiveled to see him. The wild-eyed man looked at him with a snarled expression. “Silverman, I presume?” He spat the words out, as though he had just tasted something that was sour.

“Yes,” said Moshe.

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“Well get over here! You are late.” Moshe looked at his watch and opened his mouth to speak. He looked at Goldman who shook his head, telling Moshe to be silent.

Heim gathered himself together and began to speak. “Both of you will be assisting me here with experiments. Our goal is to better understand the effects of certain substances upon the human body. We will be injecting some substances into the bloodstream and measuring their effects.” He was silent for a moment.

Moshe began to speak without taking the time to think about it. “Herr Doctor Heim,” he began in a respectful tone, “what substances are we to inject?”

Heim stared at Moshe for a very long time. Finally, raising his black eyebrows, he replied, “in this case, benzene.” Moshe looked at Goldman. Goldman gave Moshe a blank stare. After a moment of silence, during which Heim looked at both doctors, Heim said, “Let’s get started.

Moshe was stunned. *Why on earth would anyone want to research the effects of benzene upon humans? It is a known poison, used in insecticides.* Throughout the morning, Heim called for human subjects. It would take the better part of a day to collect enough human subjects to begin the research. *I must find a way to stop this madness!*

At lunch, in the crowded commissary, Moshe was able to speak privately with Goldman. “Albert, what is this maniac going to do with benzene?” Goldman looked like he was about to become sick. His complexion was ashen. Moshe spoke again. “Albert, are you ill?” For a long time, Goldman refused to speak. Finally, Moshe grasped his shoulders and shook him. “Albert, what is he going to do?”

Finally, Goldman’s eyes cleared and he responded. “Silverman, we will be... injecting benzene into the bloodstream of our... subjects.” Goldman then pushed his chair back and slumped against a nearby wall. Moshe pulled his chair next to Goldman’s and asked him what they would be expected to do. There was no response. A blank stare told Moshe that his friend Albert was now far away, lost in his role as a perpetrator of insane violence. The tortured expression on his face gave witness to his inner struggle.

Suddenly, Moshe thought about his own part in this new task. Conducting an autopsy on someone that the Nazis had killed was one thing. But killing an innocent person by injecting a poison into their bloodstream was completely different. For the first time, the Nazis were asking Moshe to do the killing. Suddenly, he was embroiled in the most important decision of his life. His heart began to pound, missing a beat every now and then. With Hanna gone, Moshe’s own life meant little. *I will cooperate with these terrorists only so far.*

He looked back at Goldman, who seemed to be in a stupor. “Albert, have you done this before?” But, Dr. Albert Goldman was sinking deeper into psychosis. “Albert! Wake up!” Finally, Moshe slapped Goldman’s face. It turned from gray to red where his fingers slapped the skin. This action soon achieved its desired results. Goldman finally was able to focus upon Moshe’s face. “Albert, have you done this before?” whispered Moshe. Goldman looked down at his trembling hands. Tears began to well up in his eyes. He finally broke down, his

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emotions overflowing his defense mechanisms. Goldman sobbed like a child, burying his face in his hands. When he finally looked up at Moshe, his face was twisted in agony. Moshe gave him his handkerchief. Wiping his tears away, Goldman opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it. Moshe thought that Goldman was struggling to find the best place to start. He allowed Goldman the time to organize his reply. Finally, in a whisper, Albert Goldman told Moshe of his sin. He began slowly, carefully selecting each word.

"I was at another camp before I came here," Goldman began in a small, trembling voice. He seemed to struggle with each word.

Moshe was impatient. "Yes, yes. You told me that you were at another camp. What was it? Mousedropping? Moshe's futile attempt at humor left him embarrassed. From the look on his face, Goldman did not at all appreciate Moshe's joke. "It was called Mauthausen." Then, as if a shadow had passed across his face, his eyes again had that distant appearance. *In his mind, he was at that camp, and he saw something that frightened him badly there.*

Finally, Goldman's eyes cleared. "There was a quarry near the main camp," spoke Goldman in a soft monotone. "Oh God, Moshe. So many terrible things happened at that quarry. I believe that if I were to be at that place again, I would turn mad. Do you believe that, Moshe?" Moshe observed that Goldman's hands did not tremble when he was speaking about Mauthausen. *Something he witnessed there had a colossal effect upon his mind. Yet, there could be catharsis in the telling.* Moshe saw an opportunity to help his poor, tortured friend.

Goldman told Jacob that the Nazis had dozens of death camps and labor camps. He had once described the camp called Mauthausen. "This camp is in your home country, Moshe – Austria. Have you been to Linz before?" Moshe nodded that he had. "Well, the camp is near Linz. I'll never forget the beautiful, shiny latch." Moshe was lost. What sort of "latch" was he talking about? "What do you mean, Albert? What is this latch that you speak of?" Goldman seemed lost in thought again and Moshe had to shake his shoulders again to bring him back. *This poor man is on the verge of a total psychotic break.*

Finally, Goldman continued. "At the main camp entrance, the doorway has this beautiful, shiny silver locking mechanism – a big silver latch, if you will. And, the whole place was once a famous marble quarry. Michelangelo himself spoke of using this marble in his sculptures. Did you know that?" But, Goldman did not wait for an answer. He was now involved in retelling his story and Moshe understood how critical this would prove to be for his mind. Goldman continued, "And beyond the quarry was the Weiner Graben." Goldman's voice trailed off at the end. His hands began to tremble again. Moshe wondered suddenly if this really would be therapeutic, or just cruel? *Perhaps it shall be some of both.*

Goldman continued, his eyes again far away. He saw the terror as he originally saw it and the pain upon his face was witness to his terror. "The steps, oh God... the steps." Tears again welled in his eyes. He wiped them away quickly. "The Germans made prisoners walk up 180 stairs with huge blocks of marble on their backs. If they fell, they were beaten to death. Those who managed to reach the top were forced to walk off of the cliff to their death below. A soldier with a machine gun stood behind the prisoner. So, the strong ones had to jump to their

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death. Either way, every prisoner died. My job was to carry the dead from the bottom to carts that take them somewhere else. Sometimes, I knew some of the dead.” Suddenly, Goldman broke down completely, burying his face in his hands. “Sometimes I knew the people. Sometimes I knew the people. Sometimes, I knew them.” Moshe listened to Goldman repeat the same sentence many, many times. Finally, he realized that Goldman was on the verge of a psychotic break.

Moshe grabbed Goldman by the shoulders and thrashed him until Albert’s eyes told him that he was back from Mauthausen. “Who did you know, Albert?” Again Goldman opened and then closed his mouth. *This is the reason. Here is where his fear lies.* Goldman looked into Moshe eyes. Moshe grasped both of Goldman’s hands in his own. They trembled violently within Moshe’s large hands. “Albert, who was it that you knew?” When Goldman finally spoke, his voice was higher than before. It sounded weak, choked off – as though he had to somehow squeeze each word out and his lacked the breath to do it. Moshe discovered that his own heart was beating very fast and he was perspiring heavily. The air suddenly felt very close and still.

As Moshe’s heart was pounding, it began to occasionally miss a beat. Perspiration was pouring down his face. “Albert, you must tell me what happened there. Look at me.” He grasped Goldman’s greasy face in his hands, forcing their eyes to meet.

Finally, while trembling, Goldman began to tell Moshe his story. “Oy, God, Moshe – they made us do such horrible things.” Moshe had never seen a man shaking as his poor friend Albert. “My God,” he whispered while trembling in Moshe’s arms, “they told us we would be helping them with scientific experiments.”

Goldman paused to wipe perspiration from his face. “SS doctors forced some of us to remove organs from living people. We bottled and stored them on shelves in the dissecting room.” Tears were now flowing down Goldman’s face and his body heaved with each breath. Poor Goldman was now sobbing uncontrollably. Still, Moshe would not be denied.

“What else, Albert? What did they make you do?” After a pause, Goldman continued in barely a whisper.

“They forced us to skin prisoners with interesting tattoos and said that they were going to sell them as book covers, gloves, luggage or lamp shades.”

Goldman told Moshe all of this while looking down. Suddenly, he looked up and met Moshe’s gaze. “One Nazi physician selected two prisoners with near perfect teeth and used their heads as paperweights on his desk.”

Moshe’s heart was broken. *How can humans do such things to others?* And, suddenly Moshe’s fear began to rise. *Will they ask me to do these things here?* He looked down at his friend Albert, who was rapidly falling back into a stupor. He had extracted more information from Goldman than he thought possible.

“They forced you to skin people?” As soon as Moshe asked the question, he wished that he had not. How could a physician live with himself after doing such damage to innocent people? Goldman retreated back into himself, tears streaming down his face. Moshe held Goldman’s trembling body in his arms.

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But, apparently, Goldman was not finished. It appeared that he was intent upon telling the entire story, not just part of it. Goldman continued.

“Yes, they did, Moshe. They forced us at gunpoint to remove the internal organs of living subjects, without anesthesia.” Moshe wondered for a moment what it would be like to have someone dissect the contents of your abdomen while awake – without anesthetic. He shivered at the thought of so many innocent victims and their tremendous pain.

“No one deserves such torture,” sighed Moshe. “Not even Nazis.”

Goldman continued to squeeze out words as best he could, in a hoarse whisper. “As I said, Moshe, I had to take out the dead bodies from the quarry after the men had jumped from the cliff. It was a very tall cliff. The probability of surviving such a fall is remote. In fact, most of the people in each group were dead when I arrived for them. The rest typically will die within hours or perhaps a few days. Unfortunately, the ones that don't die immediately suffer greatly. You see, Moshe, the Germans *wanted* them to suffer. And that's where I came in again. If you can imagine it, some of the Germans even enjoyed themselves while further torturing the broken men underneath the cliff. You see, even after such a great fall, death does not necessarily arrive immediately. I knew that if I could move them quickly into the carts, I could give them a quick, painless death. But I saw the Nazis kicking and hitting these poor, innocent broken people upon the ground. They were all paralyzed in part or totally. They could not move to defend themselves. Some of them still had use of an arm or a leg.”

Albert rambled on, apparently needing to tell the entire story. “I watched as they scuttled along the ground, pushing themselves with their arms, while their useless legs trailed behind. Nonetheless, some of the Nazis drove stakes into their bodies. Many times, I saw them drive their bayonet into the poor souls writhing upon the ground. They would drive in the bayonet and then twist it, inflicting the greatest possible pain. And these poor people could do nothing to get away. You know, Moshe, I had no way to help these poor people, so when I got there first, I used rocks to break their skull at the occipital point.” Goldman pointed to a spot on the back of his own head. “But, there's more.”

Moshe held his friend Albert in his arms. He listened and nodded his head, all the while screaming inside. Goldman finished his story in such a hushed voice as to be nearly inaudible. “Moshe, one day while I was back at the barracks, a friend came rushing in to see me.” The tears spilled over and now Goldman was sobbing uncontrollably. Moshe put his arm around Goldman's shoulder. The sobbing continued for several minutes. Finally, Goldman straightened his posture, wiped away his tears and cleared his throat. *Here it comes!*

“Moshe, the friend who came in to my barracks woke me up. He kept saying, ‘Weiner Graben, come, come.’ He grabbed me out of a sound sleep and dragged me across the camp. Moshe, being a physician, I am used to people waking me up. I assumed that someone fell from the cliff and required medical attention. I was, at that time, the only doctor present. But there was something else in my friend's eyes. It was fear. We all experienced fear at the hands of the Nazis there. But something told me that this time the fear had to do with me, personally. I asked him who it was several times. But he refused to answer.

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Each time, he simply muttered, ‘come, come.’” Moshe felt Goldman tremble in the fear as he told the story. *Who was it?*

After another brief period of uncontrollable sobbing, Goldman seemed ready to continue. Moshe looked into his eyes and saw the fear. “Oh, Albert. Go ahead and tell me. You will feel better after that.” Moshe tried to smile.

Goldman took a deep breath, looked straight ahead and continued in a very unsteady voice. “I arrived at the Weiner Graben at dusk. Shadows cast long lines from the cliff down into the ground below. I saw a number of bodies cast about the area. As usual, many of them were moving their legs or arms upon the ground. That’s not to say that anyone stood up and walked. That, of course was impossible after a fall of such distance. As you might anticipate, there were many fractures, primarily of the femur, tibia and fibula, and sometimes the patella. These injuries created a tremendous amount of pain. The lucky ones were those who managed to land head first. They died instantly. But the survivors screamed and thrashed in pain. As I arrived, I saw one of the German soldiers stabbing a man who was writhing on the ground. It was obvious that the poor man’s spinal cord had been damaged. You see, his arms were moving, pushing actually. But he could not move his legs. The German soldier laughed and looked at his comrades, who also laughed. They called him names, like ‘cripple Jew’ and ‘stupid Jew.’ I climbed and ran as fast as I could. You see, the screams had a familiar sound. When I reached the man, I saw that it was not a man. It was a boy, barely of Bar Mitzvah age.” Goldman’s voice was so soft and quiet that Moshe could barely hear him. Still his violent tremors continued. Goldman whispered on. “And the reason that the screams sounded familiar, Moshe, was... that he was... my son.”

Moshe pushed himself away in shock. *What cruel fate would make a man witness the tortured death of his own son?* Suddenly, Albert’s odd behavior made sense. The poor man not only lost his entire family to Nazi terror, he had to watch his son die a horrible death. *Dear God, the inhumanity of these Nazis is overwhelming.* Moshe’s heart was broken for his poor friend.

Goldman seemed unfazed and continued. “I pushed the German soldier away. He turned on me and smashed his pistol on my head. I was unconscious for a few minutes. When I woke, I was alone with my son. His body had been punctured by a bayonet dozens of times. His trousers were pulled down, along with his underwear. The Nazis had cut his genitals to pieces. He was covered with blood. Yet, Moshe, he was still conscious. His arms and fingers moved, as did his head and neck. He spit bright red blood from his mouth and nose. Clearly, he had endured massive internal damage. He had ruptured blood vessels everywhere. I picked him up and placed his broken body in my lap. This caused him great pain. However, he knew that I was with him at the end. He died with the name of God on his lips.”

Moshe noticed that Goldman had stopped trembling. He seemed suddenly at ease with himself, wiping perspiration from his receding hairline with a white handkerchief. He now spoke in a more firm tone. “Moshe, I had to take my son’s body to the camp where he was burned. There isn’t even a place for me to visit him. He will have no headstone. But Moshe, that day changed my life com-

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pletely. Yes, I did participate in some of Dr. Heim's experiments. At least, I think that I did. It was in the days after my son's death that Dr. Heim arrived at Mauthausen. Some of the Polish doctors called him 'Dr. Death.' I was not in command of my faculties, Moshe. The torture and murder of my son had damaged my ability to understand what I was doing. It was like living in a dense fog. I recall obeying commands. I'm not sure what I may have injected into patients. Perhaps I was clinically psychotic. I must also admit that I injected myself with morphine many times there, after my son was killed. Do I regret it? Of course I do. Could I have stopped the experiments? No. Will I do it again?" Goldman's sparking eyes looked deeply into Moshe's eyes. "I will never again assist the Nazis in experiments that place innocent life at risk. I will do autopsies. I will examine people. I will serve patients to the best of my ability. But never again will I help these evil people with their sickening genocide."

Moshe smiled and his friend Albert smiled back. "I'm with you," Moshe whispered. Now, listen to me. I will kill that scoundrel Heim myself. However, I will need to have him close to me and cornered." Moshe looked into Goldman's soft brown eyes. Light from a nearby lamp danced across his spectacles. "For that, Dr. Goldman, I will require your assistance."

Goldman did not hesitate in replying. "Moshe, you know that you can count on me. I have accepted death. After what I've seen in places like this, I would not want to be a survivor anyway. But, Moshe, you have now given my death some meaning. I will do whatever you ask." Moshe looked down at Goldman's hands. They were no longer trembling. He took them in his hands and held them tightly for a moment.

Moshe stared into Goldman's tired red eyes. "Albert, you and I will do a mitzvah. The Talmud teaches that killing to prevent further killing is a good deed. Thank you, my friend."

The next day, as scheduled, Moshe entered the Infirmary laboratory. Goldman sat nervously smoking in a chair next to a table and lamp. In the lamp's brightness, he looked ten years older. Moshe noticed how rapidly his hair had been falling out during the past few months. Now, almost bald, he looked like an old man.

Moshe approached him and pulled up a desk chair. "How are you today, Albert? Goldman looked shaky. He was looking at the floor. Moshe saw that his complexion was pale. "Are you ready for what we need to do today?" Moshe noticed that Goldman seemed to be trying to collect himself. Finally, he pushed himself up in the chair, improving his posture.

Pulling nervously at his necktie, Goldman spoke in a raspy voice. "Yes, Moshe. I am ready. I was just thinking about my wife and my son. I'll see them again soon." He offered a half-hearted smile. "You know, after my son was killed I often wished for death. I still wish for death. My family is gone. There is no more reason to live."

Moshe leaned forward in his chair and pulled Goldman's face up so that they were in direct eye contact. After a moment of silence, Moshe whispered to Goldman. "Albert, today you can hit back. Today, you and I can do something that may save lives. Perhaps this will save many lives. Perhaps there will be less

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torture, if we are successful. But, Albert, I do know this. It's time for good souls to step forward against Nazi tyranny. Even if the action today results in our death, it is a righteous action. And, it will be a righteous death. My dear friend, think about it this way. If there is a heaven, you will surely be blessed there. And, if there is not a heaven, well you and I will no longer be tortured or forced to torture and kill innocent people." Albert smiled, his fear now buried under his anger. He was ready to fight back.

Albert and Moshe stood up together. Goldman paused to carefully adjust Moshe's bow tie. "Why do you always wear a bow tie, Moshe? There are lots of other ties to wear, you know." Moshe smiled at Goldman. He knew now that his friend Albert would be fine when the moment arrived for them to kill Heim. Neither of them would panic. Both men were prepared to die. Moshe smiled and said, "You know me, Albert. I am just a bow tie person." He smiled and winked at Albert as they put their lab coats on.

At 10:00 a.m., Dr. Albert Heim entered the laboratory. Goldman was assisting Moshe with an autopsy on a fourteen-year-old boy. The boy looked shockingly similar to Jacob. He had the same thick, dark hair. During a pause in the procedure, Moshe became lost in his thoughts about Jacob. For the first time, there was urgency in his thoughts. He knew that death was nearby. Moshe unraveled an envelope that he had hidden in his trousers. Inside was his final letter to Jacob. He quickly walked out of the room and gave the letter to a nurse. She had instructions to give the letter to the kapo who lived in Jacob's barracks.

The letter inside was in Moshe's unique small, tight, perfect handwriting. At first glance, the script was so small that one might look for a magnifying glass. But, Jacob had seen that tight script so often that he could read it anywhere. It said:

9, January, 1945

Dear Jacob,

My dear sweet son, know that I think of you and Rachael constantly. I pray that you are alive and that one day, you and Rachael will have a normal life. I am sorry that I will not be able to be a part of it. I am sorry that my grandchildren will not know me. I hope that you understand why, my wise son.

I cannot by action or will, cause harm to anyone. I swore that oath when I became a physician. The terror of Nazi Germany has led us to this horrible place and taken your mother's life. There is nothing that I can do that will bring her back. Yet, it may be within my power to damage the Nazi Reich, if only in a small way. Before I leave this earth, I will do whatever is in my power to stop the madness that is destroying our people.

All of the signs that confused me in the past have become clear in this terrible prison. When I was a child, an angel told me about you. I did not fully comprehend it until we arrived in this place of death and torture. You were meant to be here, in this evil

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place and time. God has chosen you to bravely save others. Jacob, the future of our people is in your hands. Fulfill your destiny. Become the leader you were born to be. Mother and I were only along for the ride. Somehow, underneath everything, I have always known this. One day soon, God's plan will be enacted through your mind and your will. Jacob, the destiny of your courage has arrived.

This will be my last communication with you, my beloved son. If there is a God and a heaven, we will meet again. I love you more than I can describe. Most importantly, my son, I wish you the greatest pleasure that life can bring. Have children. Teach them how to be good, learned Jews. Teach them how to help others. They will be the future of our race.

Think of your mother and me as your life unfolds. Remember the past. We are all a product of those who came before us. They produced a light for us to follow. Jacob, that light is now almost gone. The future of Judaism is now up to you. Rebuild our people from the ashes of this terrible conflagration. Do not allow our Jewish way of life to disappear.

With All of My Heart,
Father

Moshe quickly ran back into the lab. Albert was still in the other room, talking to one of the Polish doctors. Moshe was grateful that he had not been missed. He looked back down at the young boy who so much reminded him of Jacob at that age. They both had so much dark, curly hair. Nazi experiments on Jewish twins often spared them from having their hair cut off. The lifeless body now rested upon a large slab of granite, his chest and abdomen open and retracted. This boy's resemblance to Jacob was so intense that Moshe asked Goldman if he could be excused. He did not believe that he would have had the courage to cut into the boy with a scalpel.

When Moshe and Goldman heard the door open behind them, they knew that Heim was arriving. Whatever ghastly ethics permitted them to inflict horrible pain and death, German's were punctual. You could say that they were compulsive about it. Moshe's heart sank as he realized that his final hours on earth had arrived. He immediately began to perspire. His heart was pounding heavily in his chest. He began to experience the all-too-familiar severe tightness in his chest. *I am only having an episode of angina. The pain does not necessarily mean that I am having damage to my heart.* Moshe looked at Goldman, who also was perspiring. He wiped it nervously with the sleeve of his lab coat. Moshe also noticed that Goldman's hands were shaking again.

Heim entered the lab with his guard – a very young and inexperienced German soldier. Moshe smiled briefly. *This is exactly what I wanted. Heim has only one guard today and this one looks like he should be in school rather than the army.* The young guard looked at the body on the autopsy table with wide

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eyes. He seemed to be deathly afraid of the body – as he stared at it unabated. Heim noticed this and shook his head in disgust. Heim took his eyes off the young army recruit and looked at Moshe and Goldman. His dark eyes seemed to bore through Moshe.

“Stop what you are doing and follow me.” Heim barked out these orders as though he was training a reluctant dog. We are going to Barracks twenty-one.” Moshe walked through the open door into bright sunlight. He walked slowly, in part to relieve the chest pain and in part to take in the world around him. The understanding that death was near arrived with a jolt of adrenaline. Moshe was completely aroused. His senses were at their peak. He noticed everything about the world in which he walked; how the sun felt on the back of his neck, the sharp sound of crows cackling and crowing in the oak trees behind the train station, how the sky was an almost impossibly azure shade of blue. The cold wind of January and the stark, leafless trees created the sense of impending death. Moshe felt as though the world in which he was walking was preparing him for death. He marveled at the tall, skeletal trees, and how the cackling crows circled above them. Moshe frowned as he thought about how he would soon be encased in never-ending darkness. As they walked, Moshe closed his eyes and imagined how the same spot would appear in the spring. He saw the trees, swollen with leaves, birds, a butterfly, ivy growing up the walls of low buildings, and the sound of insects coming back to life. This flood of sensory input was unanticipated, so Moshe slowed to enjoy it. He wondered if everyone has such a vivid experience shortly before death.

Suddenly, the young soldier pushed the butt of his rifle into Moshe’s back. “Get moving, prisoner,” he snarled in a young man’s cracking voice. Moshe’s back ached where he had been hit. He glanced at Heim, who was staring at him with a smile on his lips. *This evil Heim enjoys watching people suffer. His mind is very sick.* Moshe began to walk faster. As he did so, his chest pain increased. While Moshe had experienced many episodes of chest pain since arriving in Auschwitz, none of them had lasted this long. This, plus his constant perspiration and difficulty breathing offered a diagnosis that Moshe preferred to avoid. *I may be experiencing cardiac tissue death right now. If I don’t find a way to rest and recuperate, my heart may give out completely.* Still, Moshe pushed himself to walk faster. They walked past building after building. They all looked the same. The ubiquitous wooden rectangles that housed tens of thousands of prisoners stretched almost to the horizon. *How many prisoners are here? And yet, these survivors are but a small fraction of those already killed. How many have they murdered, in cold blood? Does the rest of the world know about this genocide? Will any of us be rescued? Where is my precious Jacob? My son, I love you more than life itself. Wherever you are, know that I love you. Please... remember me.*

They entered barracks twenty-one. The entire length of the barracks had been split in half. On one side, Moshe saw thirty to forty prisoners – a mix of men and women. He also noticed a few children. On the other side of the lengthy barrier was a small basic laboratory. Moshe saw about a dozen stretchers, along with tables. On each table was a lengthy survey with questions. Upon closer

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inspection, Moshe saw that he and Goldman were to record the effects of a new “injection” as they occurred.

Moshe was disturbed by the size of the room. He had hoped to be in the much smaller laboratory of the infirmary. There, he could trap Heim in a corner. Here, he would need help. He prayed that Goldman would be up to the task. His heart was pounding ever harder, as he began to accept that his final moments of life had arrived. *I never thought that I would die in a place such as this!* Moshe thought about all of the innocent Jews that had died already. *How many more will die before we are rescued – if we are rescued? God, please help me stop this evil physician. Let me live long enough to know that he will never again kill my people.*

Heim instructed Moshe and Goldman to a large table in the center of the “experiment” side of the barracks. Moshe could still hear the raucous crows arguing in the distant trees. *What would it be like to be up in those trees right now? What would it be like to be free?* Heim suddenly grasped Moshe’s left arm and squeezed it until the pain was unbearable. “Pay attention Silverman or I’ll have you sent for special treatment!” Moshe smiled with the thought that he could be somewhere else – anywhere else. He wondered why Nazis always used the words “special treatment” instead of telling the truth. *Why can’t they say, “I’ll send you to the gas chamber?” They have the chutzpah to kill a million innocent civilians, yet lack the bravery to speak out loud the name of their killing device.*

Heim went on without letting go of Moshe’s arm. “Today, we will be measuring the effects of several compounds on the human body. We’ll begin with several common herbicides, followed by benzene.” They walked together to the tables on the experiment side of the room. The building was damp and smelled of mold. On the other side of the separation, men and women prisoners were coughing and shuffling their feet to stay warm. Jacob noticed that virtually all of the prisoners wore the yellow Star of David on the front of their clothing. *They will be killing Jews again today!*

Here it is at last, thought Moshe. *The next few moments will define my character. I would rather die than hurt anyone, much less my own innocent people.* Moshe was thankful that Heim still had only the one guard. However, another guard who was with the prisoners was a concern. Two guards reduced the chance of success for Moshe’s plan. He looked at Goldman’s hands. They were not trembling. *That is a very good sign.* After about five minutes, the first prisoners were brought into the room.

The first group of selected prisoners was forced to lie on their back upon stretchers. Their arms and legs were strapped down. “All we need exposed is an arm,” cried Heim to the guards. Meanwhile, Moshe and Goldman were preparing doses of the herbicides and benzene in sterile needles.

As they finished, Moshe whispered to Goldman. “Albert, wait for my signal. Then, hold him down long enough for me to inject something into him.” Goldman winked and smiled, but said nothing.

Moshe’s chest now felt like a volcano about to explode. He continued to perspire heavily. He felt one lung short. The constant pain in his chest was

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almost overwhelming. *It is without doubt a myocardial infarction. I am certainly experiencing cardiac tissue damage. The question is, how much longer will I live? I must live long enough to put this wicked man's life to an end!*

Moshe bent over the first patient, syringe in hand. He pretended to administer the benzene and have trouble. "Dr. Heim. Would you please come over here?" Moshe winked at Goldman, who stared wide-eyed at Moshe and tried to follow his lead.

"What is it?" grumbled Heim as he walked to Moshe's position over the stretcher. Moshe noticed with satisfaction that Goldman walked in the same direction, but behind Heim.

"I'm having some trouble with this vein. Could you please look at it?" Moshe prayed that Heim would take the bait. Heim finally arrived, with Goldman in tow. The two guards were now far away, engrossed in a deep conversation near the barracks entrance. Moshe's prayers were answered. Everyone was in perfect position. *We have a chance.*

As Heim bent over to see what the problem was, Moshe grasped his head and right arm in a headlock and fell on top of him. Heim and Moshe tumbled to the barracks floor. Moshe grasped the fatal syringe in his right hand. He saw a large vein pulsating on Heim's neck. *That vein will do, but I'd rather use his Carotid!* Suddenly, Moshe was overcome by a tremendous pain in his chest. It felt as though a fully-loaded truck had just parked its wheels on top of Moshe's chest. "Owwww," he cried as they struggled on the floor. The pain raced into his left shoulder and arm. He had never felt such intense, disabling pain. It was difficult to move at all. Moshe had experienced cardiac angina many times during the past year, particularly with exertion or stress. But this time, it was much different. *At least one of my major coronary arteries is totally blocked. Either way, the stenosis has drained my heart of blood. There is no longer enough oxygen flow. My heart is dying rapidly.*

Meanwhile, Heim had recovered from his surprise and grasped Moshe's arm, preventing the syringe from penetrating his skin. Moshe fought back. Unfortunately, he was badly weakened by his rapidly failing heart. *I can't hold him much longer.* Suddenly, Moshe felt a huge pressure from behind Heim. In a moment, Goldman's face appeared over Heim's shoulder.

"Nice to see you, Albert," gasped Moshe.

Goldman smiled and said, "My pleasure to assist, Dr. Silverman. But, Moshe, you don't look so good."

Heim began to scream. "Help me! Help me!"

Moshe saw that the two guards had begun to respond. He yelled at Goldman. "Albert, I'm having a coronary. My heart won't last much longer. Hold his body!"

Somehow, Goldman had found the strength to hold Heim in a prostrate position. Quickly, Moshe grasped the syringe and thrust it into Heim's neck. Suddenly, he heard the deafening sound of machine guns. The shots reverberated inside the building. Smoke rose lazily towards the ceiling from the machine guns. Moshe heard Goldman gasp. Heim was beginning to get up without restraint. "Albert! Albert!" Moshe screamed for him, but there was no answer.

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Then, he saw Goldman's limp body fall from behind Heim's body. Bright red blood rushed from Goldman's mouth and nostrils. He appeared unconscious or dead.

Heim stood up, glaring at Moshe. The syringe, still embedded in his neck, bobbed up and down in the air. Moshe quickly stood up and grasped the syringe before Heim could get his hand on it. Gasping for air, Moshe glared into Heim's wide open eyes in defiance. He maneuvered the syringe into Heim's left carotid artery and pushed the plunger, squeezing the toxic chemical into Heim's bloodstream.

Suddenly, Moshe's chest exploded in one final episode of agony. With anger upon his face, Moshe glared into the terrified eyes of the Nazi monster. Then, he realized that he had gone into heart failure. His heart now fluttered helplessly. He found it difficult to breathe as fluid accumulated in his lungs. Still, he managed to gather enough air to spit out one final sentence to his tormentor. "Do your own killing, Nazi."

Just then, the machine guns resounded, filling the room with their tremendous sound and smoke. Five machine gun bullets tore through Moshe's torso.

Falling to the floor, Moshe prayed that he had been able to kill the evil Nazi doctor. He looked up at Heim as his heart finally came to a stop. In his dying vision, Moshe saw Heim's eyes roll up into his head, as the perverse Nazi physician fell to the floor, dead.

Moshe's final thoughts were of Jacob and Hanna. As he lay upon the dirt floor of the barracks, he recalled the fearful moment when, as a child, an angel told him, "Yours will save many." The pain from his wounds now overwhelmed the pain in his chest. Moshe's heart had stopped pumping. It lay silent in his chest, a dead muscle. In a gasping whisper, Moshe began to recite the most basic Jewish prayer. "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord is our God – the Lord is one." With the prayer upon his lips, Moshe lapsed into eternity.

Chapter 54

The Frantic Pace Of Mass Killing

Each time a new train arrived, Jacob and the orchestra were called into duty. Whether it was morning, afternoon or the middle of the night... the orchestra was on duty to perform. The long, winding lines of new prisoners had always looked the same. The families came in time and time again. Hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children – all arrived destined for death at the hands of Nazi planners.

But, something was different now. The prisoners lined up for the gas chamber were different. Gone were the families, replaced by factory workers. The Nazis now killed the strong prisoners they had saved for forced labor. Total extermination was the rule. By the fall of 1944, the nearby factories had grown silent. The new orders were to eliminate the camp prison population. And, the Germans seemed in a great hurry to complete their task. There were fresh rumors of advancing Russian military forces. Some prisoners believed that the camp would be dismantled and taken deep into Germany, so that the total destruction of the Jews might still be accomplished.

Jacob lived at the edge of sanity. The orchestra was disbanded at the end of 1944. The Nazis no longer needed to distract the long lines of incoming families. The families themselves were gone, gassed and cremated. Only the workers remained alive. And, most of them were diseased and near death. Many of Jacob's friends were now being marched into the gas chambers. When the chambers were too full, they were lined up and shot. Jacob had lost his orchestra job and was placed in a Sonderkommando barracks. Upon arrival, Jacob realized that he too would soon be killed.

One cold, dark and dreary morning in early January, Jacob paused while eating his watery gruel. A kapo named Eli Rothstein approached him. Eli carried his usual grim features. A stocky, balding man in his fifties, Eli only reluctantly spoke with the men in his Sonderkommando barracks. Due to his persistent frown and reluctance to speak, the prisoners uniformly disliked him. In secret, Eli feared other prisoners and believed that they disliked him. He therefore avoided contact. The only person that Eli would speak with was Jacob. Everyone, it seemed, felt close to Jacob.

Eli grunted as he sat down. For a moment, neither man spoke. Jacob finally decided to break the silence. "It's going to be another freezing day today Eli, don't you think? Eli looked up at Jacob, and then averted his eyes quickly – looking back down at the ground. There was another long, uncomfortable silence. Water vapor released by their respiration wafted into the cold, gray sky.

Finally Eli spoke. His voice was shaky and hoarse. "Jacob, I've just been to the infirmary." He stopped again, with eyes wide in anxiety. Jacob looked into Eli's face and saw the fear.

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“Are you sick, Eli?”

Eli shook his head and grunted. “No, Jacob. I am not sick. The kapo from your old barracks said that he had a message for someone in my barracks. He said that I should give this to you.”

Eli reached into his trousers and unfolded an envelope. Before taking it, Jacob put his hand on Eli's arm. “What is it, Eli? Their eyes finally met. Jacob was surprised to see tears brimming in Eli's eyes. When he looked down at the envelope in Eli's shaking hands, he saw his name on the front – in his father's tight, neat handwriting.

Eli spoke in barely a whisper. “Jacob, I'm very sorry to have to tell you that your father is dead. He left this for you.”

The words echoed through Jacob's mind. They were the words that Jacob most feared. He always knew that one day he would hear them. Yet, he had mentally pushed that date far into the future. Jacob had always been deeply in love with his father. At times, he felt that they were as close as two souls could be. He knew that his father felt the same way about him. He understood that his father was sick. He saw it in his eyes. And, he knew that life was cheap in Auschwitz. Yet, somehow he had not anticipated his father's death here.

The world started to spin around Jacob's head. He felt faint and nauseous. He stared, wide-eyed, at Eli, who continued to offer the envelope in his outstretched hand.

Suddenly, Jacob became defiant. “How do you know that your friend is telling the truth? Could he have meant another Jewish doctor? Are you *positive*? Did he tell you that it was ‘Silverman’? It could have been someone else!”

Eli's hard-set features melted. Like everyone, Eli had developed a deep fondness for Jacob. “Yes, Jacob. I asked two kapos from the infirmary. They both told me how he died.” Then, Eli did something entirely unanticipated. He gently placed his arm around Jacob's shoulder. He could not recall the last time that he touched someone. Yet, his affection for Jacob had become paramount. When he spoke again, it was in a soft, tender voice. “Jacob, your father died as a hero, fighting the Nazis.” It was the first kind act that Jacob could recall from Eli. He whispered in Jacob's ear. “Rather than experiment on prisoners, Dr. Silverman died triumphantly. He killed Dr. Heim, who demanded that he participate in a horrible experiment. Jacob, they wanted your father to inject poison into the blood of healthy people, just to observe how they die. Jacob, listen to me! Your father died a hero. It was a great mitzvah, Jacob.”

Eli described for the stunned Jacob how Moshe injected the Nazi physician with the same poison gas that he meant to use on Jewish prisoners. He placed the letter in Jacob's trembling hands. Jacob looked down and saw his name on the front of the envelope. His father's beautiful, tightly controlled handwriting brought tears to his eyes. Weeping, he read his father's final, loving words. When he was done reading, Jacob looked up into the gray sky and screamed. The agony was incredible. It was as though a great part of Jacob's soul had been torn away. In an instant he realized that his life would never be the same again. He would never laugh again with the same free innocence. His rock and foundation was gone. His misery could not have been more deep or intense.

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News of his father's death decimated Jacob. It was worse than hearing of his mother's death in the gas chamber. He suddenly understood what it felt like to be an orphan. Jacob and his father had been the very best of friends. Throughout his life, Jacob had learned strength, resilience and courage from his father. As long as he could recall, Moshe had been his penultimate source of reason and wisdom. He was by far the most kind, gentle and pleasing person he had known. Moshe Silverman was Jacob's moral compass. Now, all of that was gone. In one swift moment, Jacob's heart was torn apart. He could not imagine living without his father. He withdrew deeply into a place that was dark and distant.

Each day, Jacob sank farther into depression. His father's courageous death haunted him. Days later, it still seemed impossible to comprehend. Jacob could not imagine how to go on in life without him. All that had been excellent and warm and decent in life was now gone. He had only Rachael and their baby. And, he had no idea if they were still alive. The concept of their child became a myth to Jacob. He could barely comprehend it. He searched for a reason to live and found only darkness. He began to question his belief in God. After all, how could a just God allow such terrible things to happen to his chosen people, and especially to his beloved father?

Jacob had begun to lose hope in Rachael's mission. *Has she been caught? What happened to the evidence that I collected at the risk of so many lives? Why haven't the Allies bombed this place?* It seemed impossible that the Allies could review his evidence and not take action to stop it. Each night, Jacob waited to hear the air raid sirens. He prayed for the Allies to destroy the entire camp, even if it meant his own death. Sometimes, the sirens came alive. Their mournful howling was music to Jacob's ears. Each time, he prayed that the bombs would fall upon the camp. But, each night the Allied bombers passed over the camp, like fabulous growling raptors bent upon finding their meal elsewhere. Once, they bombed a nearby munitions factory. But that only increased the death rate, as prisoners who worked there were put to death. *Where are you, Rachael? Why don't the Allies bomb this camp? Don't they know how many innocent people are being slaughtered here every day? Don't they believe my evidence?*

Suddenly, there were fewer and fewer train transports with new prisoners. Jacob heard the continuing rumors about how the Allies were winning the war. There were more and more rumors that the Russian Army was advancing rapidly from the East. Twice more, the Allies had hit manufacturing plants near Auschwitz-Birkenau. The result was bad for Jews in the camp, as again the prisoners who worked in those factories were sent to the gas chambers. As soon as they lost their value as workers, the Nazis killed them.

The Germans, themselves, seemed out of sorts. They no longer joked or played games. Their mood had become solemn and grim. Everyone wondered if the reason for the Nazi despair was that they were losing badly. Rumors abounded everywhere. Newly captured Russian prisoners told Jacob that the Russian army would liberate the camp in a matter of days. They said that the German army had begun to lose the war on the Eastern front during the powerful winter of 1943-44. They said that this winter was even worse, as hundreds of thousands of German soldiers were killed or died attempting to march back to Germany. Other prison-

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ers told of advancing British and American troops. For the first time, Jacob learned details of the Allied invasion at Normandy. A captured American pilot had been sent to Auschwitz. Although he was not assigned to Jacob's barracks, he met the man once in the commissary. When Jacob asked the pilot why he had been sent to Auschwitz, the middle-aged man smiled and said, "Well, I am Jewish."

Jacob rejoiced with each new description of how the Allies were winning the war. However, as each new piece of the puzzle fell into place, a new fear arose within him. If the Nazis were losing the war, they would likely attempt to cover up their hideous death camps before the Allies arrived. Jacob feared that they would kill the remaining prisoners before allowing the Allies to enter the camp.

The expansive mechanizations in and around Auschwitz-Birkenau abruptly came grinding to a halt. Something important was happening. Rumors swirled throughout the camp. Each night, the prisoners heard artillery pounding away to the East. Could the Russian army be this close? Or, was it German artillery beating the Russians back? Others told of hearing that the Americans and British were pushing through France and Austria, towards Germany. Now, no one could deny that the war was going badly for the Germans. Jacob was never one to hold much faith in rumors. Still, he could not help but feel that the prisoners who had survived were in great danger. While everyone else rejoiced at the German's misfortune, Jacob was solemn. *If this camp is no longer productive, they will kill us all. At best, we will be moved to a camp closer to Germany.* He shared these thoughts with no one. But, each night before falling asleep, Jacob began to produce a plan for the escape and survival of prisoners.

Jacob had begun to experience very strange feelings each night at bedtime. As he drifted into sleep, he mind suddenly became filled with scenarios of escape. These visions were inherent within his mind, rather than the product of a careful external plan. It was somewhat like composing a symphony by taking dictation. Yet, where did the dictation originate? Military plans appeared in his mind, completed to the finest detail. Jacob had no idea where these plans came from. He had never had military training. Yet, every night, just before he fell asleep, his mind reeled with vast details of military scenarios. It was both frightening and confusing. He could only conclude that God was implanting this information in his mind for future implementation. It was terribly confusing to be an instrument of God. Yet, Jacob accepted the role without fear. He now accepted that it was his destiny. He realized that he had been born to fulfill this role.

Over and over again, Jacob "saw" himself and a long line of prisoners walking through an endless countryside. They were guarded loosely by a small contingent of German troops. And the troops were regular German army, not the highly trained *Waffen SS* that hounded and killed prisoners so effectively. Visions poured through his mind. It felt like watching himself in a movie. He could not stop the visions or change them with his own thoughts. Each time, he saw a long line of ragged, diseased, malnourished and exhausted prisoners, forced to walk through a frozen landscape. He saw hundreds of prisoners fall to the ground. Each time, a German soldier shot the prisoner where they lay, exhausted and unable to continue.

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The vision-dreams tormented Jacob every night. It was as though he was forced to watch the same terrible movie without end. The emotional pain was overwhelming. Sometimes, Jacob saw his friends die on this incredible death march. It seemed that there was no escape from these powerful visions. Then, one night in mid-January, Jacob realized the purpose of the visions. *God has given me a wonderful gift. He has allowed me to see into the future. There could be only one reason for this endowment. I must use it to help my fellow prisoners. I must find the German weaknesses and prepare a plan for escape. Truly, God would not place this vision in my head if he had not wanted me to use it for good. I must create a plan to help my friends escape. This is my destiny.*

Jacob used the visions to probe the German army for weaknesses. He saw, in his visions, that their strength was little more than an armored company. The Germans were stretched out too far – from horizon to horizon. The soldiers were teenagers and old men. They marched sloppily, as though they were undisciplined. Clearly, the Germans had sent their most successful troops into battle, leaving their most ineffective and undisciplined troops to guard the poor, sick Jews who had no weapons at all. Jacob would use this to his advantage – if it played out to be true. *We can fight these German children and old men, if we can capture some of their weapons!*

Each day Jacob devoted time to planning to defeat the Germans. His mind reeled with critical questions. *What type of location offers the best chance for escape? Will we have better hiding places in a city, or in open country? If we rebel in a city, will the citizens help, or hinder the German soldiers? How can the prisoners capture or take away weapons? Which prisoners can be counted on to participate in such a plan? Which prisoners know how to use rifles and pistols? What if we were able to commandeer a machine gun? Who has had experience with such weapons? There are Russian Army prisoners in Auschwitz. Would they participate? Could they be trusted not to shoot the Jews after the Germans were disposed of? Who can I trust to keep such information away from the Germans? Can any of the kapos be trusted? What time of day or night will be the best for escape?*

Jacob searched for someone who understood the lunar calendar. He needed to predict the phases of the moon. There were a thousand details to consider in planning this rebellion. Jacob's mind staggered with thoughts of military action each day. Meanwhile, he shared this information with no one. Fortunately, the planning of his rebellion took Jacob's mind away from his personal loss and depression. The death of his father was terribly painful, yet Jacob's mind was too busy to dwell upon it. Nevertheless, if he died in such a rebellion, he would join his parents.

One night, Jacob dreamed of being with the Sonderkommando of Crematoria IV when they rebelled last October. The barracks that served Crematoria IV consisted mostly of Czechs. There were a few Romanians and captured Russian soldiers, as well. They had acquired gunpowder and dynamite from the munitions plant. Brave workers brought it back in their pockets. Little by little, they accumulated enough powder to blow up the building. It must have taken months. For Jacob, the dream was a surreal experience. Although he was unable

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to participate, he could see the rebellion and fighting all around him. At first, Jewish prisoners seemed to spring out from the walls to jump on top of the German guards, hitting them with homemade weapons. It happened in an instant. The guards were so surprised that none of them got off a shot. Within seconds, the Czech prisoners were in control of the building. Jacob watched as the group's leaders planted the dynamite and a barrel filled with gunpowder near the ovens. Bodies burned in the giant fire and other bodies were on racks outside the oven entrances. The Czechs passed out rifles, machine guns and pistols that they had taken from the guards. Suddenly, Jacob stood outside the crematoria as the explosion tore a massive hole in the structure. He saw a large trail of smoke drifting up from the building. Other German soldiers arrived to quash the rebellion and extinguish the fire. The Czech prisoners shot at them from the burning building. For a few minutes, they pinned the Germans down, killing a handful of guards. Then, Jacob watched in horror as the Germans set up a fifty-caliber machine gun and sent thousands of rounds of ammunition into the damaged crematoria. Within a few minutes, no more shots came from the burning structure. The rebellion ended as swiftly as it began.

Jacob's dream did not stop. Strong winds fanned the fire until it consumed the crematoria building completely and burned down the barracks closest to it. Jacob mourned the loss of the brave Czechs. Yet, he and his friends rejoiced and celebrated. Prisoners had finally rebelled, and in a significant way. The camp was now down to only two operating crematoria.

Had the number of incoming prisoners not diminished during succeeding months, the rebellion would have created a huge bottleneck in the Nazi death machine. But, as it was, the flow of prisoners had slowed considerably in the fall of 1944. The Nazis no longer required three working crematoria to deal with the reduced number of deaths. Yet, the rebellion was cause for celebration. The Czech prisoners had accumulated a small cache of arms, including machine guns and several thousand rounds of ammunition. Of course, the Germans had many well-trained and well-armed troops. Their machine guns tore through the thin wooden walls of the barracks, killing most of the rebelling prisoners within a few minutes. A small group of armed prisoners in a nearby barracks was also killed by machine gun, rifle and mortar fire. Many of the remaining prisoners in the rebellion were killed by fire or smoke inhalation. Only a few dozen armed prisoners remained to be recaptured. When their ammunition ran out, they were forced to surrender. The Nazis won the battle. But, for the first time, they saw that prisoners willed themselves to fight back. Jacob made a mental note. *We must capture those 50-caliber machine guns before they can be used against us.* And then, in a flash, he woke up.

The next day, Jacob shivered while standing for roll call in the morning. The prisoners' breaths steamed out of their mouths like smoke above a locomotive, hanging for a moment in the bright lights over the barracks before disappearing into the dark sky above. Later that day, as Jacob returned from orchestra rehearsal, he heard shots ring out over the compound. The shots were at regular intervals, with only a few seconds between each shot. He saw a long line of prisoners in the open field next to his barracks. They stood in line in front of a

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long, deep trench. One by one, they were being shot in the head. They tumbled down into the trench, arms and legs splayed out, falling upon each other in deathly disarray. The wind was strong and the Germans were having trouble with spraying blood. They argued with each other. Finally, they moved to the other side of the trench. On occasion, a prisoner ran for freedom. Few of them made it to the fence before being shot. Those that did were instantly electrocuted. They hung upon the electrified fence, like scarecrows trapped in a circus of demise. Smoke and steam rose from their bodies. Some of them caught fire and burned. The acrid smell of burning flesh carried across the open yard to Jacob's barracks. He recognized that smell from his terrible dream. It was the same smell as in the crematoria building. It smelled like burning meat, but not exactly. It was unlike any other odor that Jacob had experienced. He understood that he would carry that dreadful odor in his mind to his grave.

Jacob suddenly realized that he was no longer shocked to witness such a terrible sight. *What has become of me that I am no longer shocked to see innocent men die? How could I no longer feel their death in my own heart? Oh God, what have I become?* Walking past this horrific scene, Jacob entered his barracks. His cold mind carried him back to his task. He continued to build his escape plan mentally. So far, he had told no one. He wished that he could plan on paper. But it was far too dangerous. Everything had to remain in his mind. As much as he wished for his rebellion to begin immediately, his mission was for the future. As he lay sprawled upon his fetid bunk, he again unfurled his father's final letter. As he did every evening, he read and re-read the letter. Finally, for the first time since his death, Jacob spoke to his father in his mind. He prayed that his words would reach his father, wherever his intellect might reside: *Father, the leader has awakened. I will not fail.*

Chapter 55

Rachael's Escape

Rachael and Paul ran through the dense forest outside Auschwitz as fast as their legs could carry them. They knew that the Germans would soon discover the absence of one of their employees as well as a prisoner. Rachael had ordered Vera and Misha to bring the Polish housekeeper and her husband to safety. By now, they should have been well on their way to freedom with the partisans. But, she could not waste time worrying about them now. Her mission had taken on an importance never before considered. The material that Jacob had accumulated was a prize well beyond Rachael's dreams. She and Paul had to reach the Allies quickly.

To confuse the Nazis tracking them, they ran south and crossed the Sol River, before turning west to rejoin the partisans. They hoped that crossing the river might allow them to slip through the dragnet. It was also logical that local police were looking for them, in addition to the SS and the Gestapo. They knew that their information about Nazi atrocities could save thousands of lives. Nothing could motivate them more.

Rachael's legs were wobbly from the constant running. She had a painful stitch in her side and each breath burned in her lungs. Her mind worked furiously. *This is the most important thing that I will do in my life. I must not fail.* Tears streamed down Rachael's cheeks, because Albert was with her instead of Jacob. She could not bear thinking about Jacob. *He looked like death was near. He seemed so feeble and weak! How much more of this could he take?*

Rachael and Albert ran through forest and fields. They raced on through the pain mindful that the information they carried could protect the lives of so many prisoners. They ran through the dense forest until their feet wobbled and they fell from exhaustion. Water was plentiful, from local streams and rivers. However, food was a problem. They ate wild mushrooms and berries. But that failed to provide for even a fraction of their bodies' energy requirements. After going without food for almost four days, Rachael and Paul were literally starving. Some newly-found roots in the forest provided minimal nourishment. But the berries made Paul sick. They gave him bouts of vomiting and diarrhea. This left him even weaker.

They assumed that the Gestapo had already spread their description to every city, town and village in the region. If they were spotted, they would not be strong enough to fight. Still, they walked on through the forest. If only they could find local partisans. But such partisans failed to materialize. Finally, on the verge of falling unconscious, they entered a town out of desperate need for food.

Walking slowly towards a cafe in the center of town, Rachael and Paul found themselves downwind of the cafe's chimney. The smell of fresh-baked

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bread hit them like a hammer. Whatever control they had mustered until then now departed. They needed food to survive and food they would have. Paul carried the precious portfolio close to his chest as they entered the cafe. "Let's sit over there," Rachael whispered, pointing to a table in a dark corner.

Paul reminded Rachael to avoid eating too much. "When you've been starving like we have, you have to eat only a little and slowly. Otherwise, you will have trouble digesting it." Rachael and Paul consumed all of the crackers on the table quickly, and then looked around for more. Waiting for their food to arrive was one of the most difficult things that Rachael had done in recent memory. When it finally arrived, they looked at each other and smiled. Rachael began to shovel the food down and was quickly admonished by Paul to eat more slowly. The feeling of food passing into her stomach was wonderful. Suddenly, she realized that Jacob had to live under the same starving conditions every day – and he had done so for years. It was a humbling thought.

Paul and Rachael's behavior had not gone unnoticed in the village cafe. Two men who were sitting at the bar only moments earlier had disappeared. But, Rachael and Paul had been distracted with eating and failed to notice. Rachael ate barely half of the food upon her plate and suddenly felt her stomach cramping. She grunted and bent forward over the table. "What's wrong," asked Paul?

"My stomach hurts," she replied. "Don't worry. I'll be all right." Rachael forced a smile.

Paul, who was still eating, mumbled, "I told you to eat slowly."

Rachael excused herself and walked to the restroom. After a few minutes, her stomach had settled down. She looked into the mirror and gasped. Her face and hands were almost black with dirt and her hair was completely disheveled. For a moment, she did not recognize herself. Her mind was spinning. *Can this woman be me?* As her composure returned, she washed her face and hands and began to leave the restroom. Suddenly, she felt a sense of danger deep inside rise to the surface of her mind. It was a warning. Rachael had felt this way only twice in her life. Each time, it preceded a terrible event. *Something terrible is about to happen!* But what could it be? Abruptly, she opened her purse and pulled out a stolen handgun. It was a German pistol. She checked to see if the clip was full, and then removed the safety.

Walking back to the table, Rachael's senses were on high alert. Her eyes darted back and forth across the cafe. She saw that Paul was paying the server for the meal. Rachael looked at the server carefully. The young man accepted Paul's money without looking at it. *That's not normal. Something is wrong and the waiter knows about it.* As Rachael's eyes met Paul's, she spotted something near the doorway. Two German officers stood at the door, gazing at Paul. Her eyes met the eyes of the Germans. *They know who we are!*

Paul must have read Rachael's facial expression, since he quickly turned and looked at the doorway. Rachael saw the look of terror in Paul's eyes. When he looked back at her, he had already grasped the portfolio and was starting to stand up. The two German soldiers began to move swiftly towards the table, opening their holsters as they walked. Rachael stood still in the center of the cafe. She was terrified. *Is this the place where I will die? Oh, Jacob, I love you*

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so much. Please remember me. She looked back at Paul. For the rest of her life, Rachael would remember Paul's eyes. They suddenly transformed from fear to understanding. He smiled briefly. It was the most tender smile that Rachael had ever seen.

Suddenly, Paul threw the portfolio up in the air towards Rachael. Time seemed to slow down as the portfolio and its precious contents spun towards her, end over end. She heard Paul's voice, yelling something at her. It seemed far away. "Take it Rachael," Paul screamed. The Germans stopped and aimed. Rachael's heart was in her throat. *I am about to die. God, please forgive me for my failure.* She raised her arms and caught the valuable portfolio. As the Nazis spun to face her, Rachael prepared to be shot. She stared into the dark pistols aimed directly at her. *So, this is the end of my life.* Prepared for death, Rachael waited for the bullets to hit.

Suddenly, just before four deafening shots rang out, Paul jumped full length in front of Rachael. Paul took two of the bullets. She heard him grunt twice as the bullets tore through his body. The third and fourth bullets whizzed past Rachael's ears on both sides. Then, just as Paul hit the floor, she heard him yell. "Run Rachael!"

Instinct took over as Rachael grabbed the portfolio from midair and ran into the kitchen. She was magically transformed back to the kitchen in the Salzburg restaurant when she and Jacob had to escape from the Nazis. Her mind was flying as more shots rang out. She heard the bullets flying through the air. They bounced off of kitchen walls and appliances. Rachael ran as fast as her legs could carry her. She ran in a crouched position, as she had been taught by the partisans. Her lower body profile presented a smaller target. Her experience with the partisans had given her stamina and strength, as well as strategic and tactical military intelligence. She was much faster now than that fateful night when she and Jacob raced against the SS in that Salzburg tavern.

Tears began to fall from her eyes as she realized that Paul was likely dead. He had saved her life by sacrificing his own life. She had never seen anyone so brave. All she could think about was Paul, with his Hebrew name of Yaakov. Jacob had the same Hebrew name.

Reaching the end of the enormous kitchen, Rachael saw two closed doors. One was probably a storage room. Rachael prayed that the other door was an exit. Suddenly, a gunshot rang out from close behind. Rachael heard a whizzing sound next to her right ear, as a bullet passed very close to her head. The bullet passed wall to the right of the two doors. With only a fraction of a second to decide, Rachael selected the door on her right, praying that it was unlocked.

The sound of military boots on the ceramic kitchen floor told Rachael that the Germans were close behind. She reached the door and found it closed. Her impetus forced her to collide into the doorway, banging her right arm and leg. She turned the handle and prayed. The doorway opened and Rachael fell, as much as flew outside. The cold air was bracing against the perspiration on her skin. She turned left and raced up a short flight of brick stairs. The cold air filled her lungs and came back out as an explosion of steam. For the first time, she realized that she did not have her winter coat.

Rachael's Escape

Rachael found herself behind the tavern in near darkness. She saw that the forest was nearby. Her prayer had been answered. She could flee back into the forest with the Auschwitz documents in hand. For the first time, she allowed herself to smile. Suddenly, another shot rang out from the tavern exit. This time, instead of listening to the bullet pass by, Rachael felt a sharp pain in her right side. The force of the bullet spun her all the way around. She stumbled and flayed her arms about in an effort to stay on her feet. As she spun around, she was able to see that at least three uniformed Germans were racing after her, pistols in hand. "Oh my God," she exclaimed. The sharp pain in her side was now burning, as though someone had placed a hot coal inside of her.

Racing into the forest, Rachael put her pain aside. She heard more gunshots from behind. Branches near her head snapped apart and fragmented as bullets filled the air around her. As she raced deeper into the dark forest, the shots sounded farther and farther away. Tree branches scraped against Rachael's face, cutting her. She continued running as fast as her legs would carry her. Finally, just as Rachael's wobbly legs were about to give in, she saw a thicket. It seemed like a good place to hide and rest. However, as soon as Rachael stepped into the thicket, she realized something was very wrong. Her feet searched for the ground to no avail. In an instant, she was airborne, tumbling head over heels through trees and branches. Rachael had fallen from the top of a cliff. Surrounded by darkness, her arms and legs splayed out in every direction as she fell. The portfolio fell helplessly into the brush. Finally, Rachael hit the bottom of the cliff with a heavy thud. Her left hip hit the ground first. It sent waves of pain from her pelvis to her spine.

Rachael lay upon the ground face down, gasping for air. The smell of damp earth filled her nostrils. Pain was coming from everywhere. She prayed that nothing was broken, as she still had a long way to go to reach the partisans. Her left hip was severely bruised. It produced waves of intense throbbing pain. As she moved, an intense burning pain came from her right side. She momentarily forgot that she had been shot.

In the darkness, Rachael grasped her right side, trying to determine if she was still carrying a bullet. The pain was intense. When she pulled her hand back up, it was covered with sticky blood. Rachael suddenly realized that she had dropped the portfolio. She stifled a scream and began to scratch away at the ground nearby. It was a moonless, dark evening. She could barely see the cloudy sky over the dense trees. Rachael scabbled around on the ground for several more minutes until her left hand touched something that felt like leather. She quickly grasped the object and pulled it up to her face. By feeling all around it, she was able to ascertain that it was, indeed, the precious portfolio. For several more minutes, Rachael lay upon the soft ground, clutching the portfolio, as though it were her life itself. She strained her ears, listening for the Nazis who were chasing her.

Suddenly, Rachael heard voices far above, speaking German. The soldiers had followed her into the forest. She quickly moved underneath some large rocks. The voices moved until they finally seemed to be directly over her head. They were just a few meters above Rachael. She was close enough to smell one

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of them, through his cigarette. Rachael prayed for them to go away. She waited trembling for the voices to fade away. After what seemed like an eternity, the voices faded away into the darkness.

Rachael decided to take no chances and remained underneath the rocks until daylight. Reaching down to her right side, she felt a large patch of something warm and wet. The bullet must have entered her just inside her waist. Her wound was painful. But, the pain in her left hip was worse. It was impossible to tell how much blood she had lost. As her adrenaline began to wear off, Rachael faded in and out of consciousness. The dark world became increasingly black. She thanked God that she was still alive. But, the thought of poor Paul dying to save her was too much. For the first time in her life, she felt real guilt. *I do not deserve to live. Paul should be taking this critical information to the Allies. I should be dead. How will I ever live with such a terrible feeling? It will consume me!* Rachael cried for hours before she lost consciousness.

In her restless sleep, Rachael began to dream. In her dream, she and Jacob were walking under a large mountain. Far below was a desert. Strangely, one side of the barren region was green with crops. A tiny village could be seen along a small road on the green side. She thought that perhaps the green came from many acres of oranges. It must be a huge plantation, she thought. They walked with a boy who appeared to be three or four years old. He looked just like Rachael had, at that age. *He is our son!* As they walked with the playful child nearby, huge guns began to fire from atop the mountain. The artillery was aiming at the tiny village below. She looked into Jacob's eyes. *He must defend the helpless!* In a flash, Rachael glimpsed the future. She gazed deeply into a world where they had a son and Jacob protected the lives of a small Jewish population in the holy land. When she looked into Jacob's eyes, she saw fierce determination, profound love and powerful commitment to his responsibility. Yet, she saw something else, in that fraction of a second when their eyes locked together. It was deep sadness and loss. She felt the cold, dark tentacles of death. *One of us will die!* A powerful wave of sadness overwhelmed Rachael. Something disastrous was about to happen. She had been allowed this momentary glimpse into a predestined future. She had become an observer, a visitor; unable to alter or change the preordained events. All that she could do was watch as events pass into the future. *I believe that it will be Jacob!* Rachael felt the agony of loss that Jacob's death offered. It felt as though her soul had been ripped apart. Suddenly, she woke up deep in the forest, to the sound of artillery. It came from east of the camp.

A pale gray daylight had arrived. Rachael struggled to come out from the rocks. It was another dark, cold, freezing winter day. The sky was filled with puffy gray clouds. The wind had picked up, making the temperature feel even colder. Rachael grunted as she stood up. She had never before been in pain like this. It was worse than childbirth. She slowly stood up, grunting and groaning. Having gained her balance, she looked above. There, she saw that she had indeed fallen a considerable distance over the edge of a cliff. She was deep in the dense forest. Examining her right side was difficult, at best. Her entire side was caked with dirt and dried blood. It looked terrible. She began to cry. Unbuttoning her

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blouse, Rachael gratefully found both an entrance and an exit hole. The bullet had apparently traveled through the right side of her waist. She could only hope that it did not damage any major internal organs. In addition, her left hip produced an intense pain with each step. She wondered if she had broken her hip or pelvis when she hit the bottom of the ravine.

Pushing her pain aside, Rachael grasped the portfolio and began limping through the forest. Fearing the German soldiers, she decided to stay away from towns. She walked in a Southwesterly direction for most of the day. As darkness neared, Rachael saw a farmhouse in the distance. There was a barn and a chicken coop next to the house.

Under cover of darkness, Rachael entered the chicken coop. At first, the chickens were fearful and made a ruckus. Rachael had to inch her way into the coop until the chickens were less noisy. In total darkness, she grasped about. Finally, she found her prize – eggs. Rachael lay upon her back, cracking egg after egg open. The eggs were warm and wet as they slid down her throat.

With her stomach full of eggs, Rachael put her head down and rested. She looked up into the wooden roof. She could see stars through slats in the structure. She thought about Jacob. *I love you, my dear. Stay alive. Stay warm. And, please stay safe. We have so much to do together!* Then, Rachael thought about food. She remembered the feasts that her mother and Jacob's mother had presented for every important Jewish holiday. They had mountains of roast beef, turkey, chicken and matzo-ball soup. There was bread, potatoes, vegetables, casseroles, pies, cakes, ice cream and so much of it was thrown away! Rachael suddenly realized that she was unable to recall her last good meal. She then slid out of the coop and walked into the barn. There, she found three cows. She milked the cows into a wooden bucket and then gulped down the warm milk gratefully. With food in her stomach, Rachael fell asleep on the barn floor.

Chapter 56

Sonderkommando

After Christmas, the orchestra members were dismissed back to their barracks. Gone were the times of sitting all day, playing Beethoven for incoming prisoners. Gone were the few precious bits of leftover food from a Nazi soirée with music. Jacob was forced to work in a nearby munitions plant. The two-mile daily walk, in addition to standing up virtually all day, was almost impossible to tolerate. When bearing weight, his left knee provided constant agony, more so when the weather was cold and damp. It was a mighty struggle for Jacob just to survive from one day to the next, from one roll call to the next. Starvation had become a significant problem, making him weaker each day. Like many others, he had lost almost half of his body weight. Still, Jacob was grateful for the munitions job. He knew that there was a worse job to be performed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Germans called it “Sonderkommando.” He knew this from his terrible nightmare. Sonderkommando included many of the jobs involved in the actual killing and disposal of prisoners. Some Sonderkommando acted as “ushers” at the gas chambers. These were mentally hardened prisoners who helped groups of prisoners undress, shave their hair and usher them into the gas chamber. Other Sonderkommando removed the dead bodies and carried them to the nearby ovens. Yet, more Sonderkommando were responsible for pushing the bodies into the fires. This was the ultimate realization of Jacob’s dream, which was never far from his mind. Only now, he could taste and smell it. He was in it!

Jacob knew many men who had been assigned to the crematoria work. He also knew that it was their final job at the camp. They were killed by the next group of Sonderkommando after two or three months. Jacob accepted that this would be his end, unless some miraculous opportunity arrived. Yet, he was surprisingly calm. Although there was some fear, it was not a fear of death. He feared failing his mission to save prisoners more than he feared death.

The reality that Jacob would soon become Sonderkommando gave frightening credence to his dream. The memory of it was always just underneath Jacob’s consciousness. He marveled at how a nightmare that disturbed him so many years ago could now be happening in reality. The concept bothered him greatly. He could only assume that he was allowed a glimpse of the future. *But, for what purpose?* As he walked to and from his job at the munitions factory, standing at attention during the ubiquitous roll call, even when talking to other prisoners – he was haunted by the dream. *How could a dream come into reality?* Jacob could no longer dismiss it as inconsequential. He was deluged with thoughts about the dream’s purpose. *Could it have been a warning? Was it a signal for something else to occur? Why was it given to me?*

Jacob was also aware of his father’s “dream” of being visited by an angel

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when he was a small boy. His father spoke of it twice, but Jacob could remember almost every word. He now reviewed it in his mind, examining every aspect for new meaning. His father was only four years old when violent anti-Semites invaded his village, killing his parents and most of his family. Little Moshe ran into the forest to escape. As he returned to the village, at the edge of the forest, he heard shouting, followed by gunfire. Suddenly, an angel appeared, running towards the forest. The angel was a young woman. Her face was twisted in horror and desperation. Her body was enveloped inside a silhouette of silky, bright white light. Behind her waving arms were satiny billowing white wings, flapping to and fro in the dark, windy night. Suddenly, just as she was about to reach the safety of the forest, the angel shuddered. Her arms flew out to the sides, with her “wings” still flowing behind. She hit the ground with a thump, but strangely her facial expression changed from fear to relaxation. She looked up at little Moshe, who was trembling at the edge of the forest. A soft, gentle smile appeared on her face. Suddenly, the angel whispered softly to Moshe. “Yours will save many.” The angel then closed her eyes and became still. Moshe had no idea what her words meant as he fled back into the dark forest. He now realized what the angel meant. “Yours” meant “your offspring.” As Jacob thought about his father’s experience, along with his nightmare, his purpose in life had become clear. Jacob had to survive beyond the end shown to him in his dream. In some way, he was meant to lead his people out of danger. And, he was reasonably certain that the time for action would arrive very soon.

Time passed, and the reality of becoming a Sonderkommando became apparent. Jacob became painfully aware of the urgency of his mission. He was certain that the call came from God. How else could an accurate vision of a nearly impossible future become implanted in the mind of a seventeen year-old boy? But, Jacob was paralyzed by the uncertainty. *Exactly when should I lead? Where will it begin? How should I start?* Jacob would gladly give his life to save his fellow prisoners. He was ready to become their leader. He trusted that God would give him a sign when it would be his turn to be a leader of men. Each night, Jacob lay awake, pondering his dilemma. Each night he prayed for an answer. None came. Yet, Jacob remained resolute, firm in his conviction that he had been selected to save prisoners. He trusted that his answers would become apparent. *God will tell me when I should begin the rebellion. I only hope it begins soon, before I lack the strength to accomplish it.*

The Germans had been methodical in their extermination routine at Auschwitz-Birkenau. One barracks after another had been emptied to the gas chambers. Work at the nearby factories and ammunition plants had diminished greatly. Whether the Allies were drawing near, or other plants were producing enough material, the frenetic atmosphere in and around the camp’s factories had slowed to a crawl.

The only part of the camp still running at full capacity was the gas chambers and crematoria. There were no more long lines of incoming families, with their fancy clothes, boisterous children and suitcases stuffed with heirlooms and pictures. No more fetid trains arrived, carrying innocent families to a premature death. No longer did the orchestra play to distract the prisoners from the horror

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of their certain demise. Instead, those about to be killed were surrounded by machine guns, watchtowers and electrified fences. Now, the long lines were camp factory workers, mostly skeletal men who had been starved and beaten. They were tools that were no longer needed. They were to be gassed, cremated and discarded as ashes into the nearby river.

Thanks to the Czechs' rebellion, there were only two working crematoria. Those now belched out prodigious fire and smoke almost constantly. Each day Jacob stared at the thundering chimneys, knowing that soon his turn to work there would arrive. Soon, as forecast in his nightmare, he would be burning the bodies of his friends.

The next night, Jacob was awakened at 3:00 a.m. by the sound of Allied bombers. "Truly," he told a new arrival, "there is no sound on earth or in heaven like the sound of three hundred heavy bombers coming in just over the rooftops. From the distance, it sounds like faraway thunder, like a lazy thunderstorm. But, soon the sound transforms itself into that of an oncoming locomotive. Or, perhaps it sounds like three hundred locomotives. Then, suddenly they are on top of you. You can hear their engines screaming away while the rooftop jumps up and down upon the barracks. For three or four seconds, your body and everything around you shakes helplessly around, like a rag doll caught inside a hurricane. Yet, almost every time the Allies decide to bomb other targets."

The young man looked up at Jacob with fear in his eyes. "When will they bomb us?"

Jacob smiled weakly. "When it is our turn, David. When it is our turn." Jacob was not smiling on the inside. He was in despair. *I wonder if we are considered a target at all. Out of all of the millions of tons of TNT that the Allies are using to bomb the German war machine, they could spare a few tons of TNT in order to put this death camp out of business, at least for a while. By now, Rachael and Paul should have given my information to the Allies. They must know what is happening to us here. Or, are we so unimportant to them?*

But this time, the bombers did not fly past the camp as usual. Something was different this time. Jacob noticed a steady pounding sound coming from the West. Soon, the ground was shaking with each impact. The Allies had started their bombing run much earlier this night. Jacob rushed to the small barracks window and gazed out into the murky, dark sky. For a moment, the bombing stopped. Everything was still. Jacob held his breath. Then, just as the prisoners were starting to return to their bunks, they heard the deep, low moaning of the air raid siren, as it returned to life. Jacob turned and saw that the prisoners were looking at each other with confusion. "God may bless us tonight," uttered the old Rabbi. The poor man weighed less than a hundred pounds and had difficulty summoning the strength for his words of prophesy.

The old man was right. Not a minute after the depressing siren moaned its way to life, the sound of bombing returned. But, this time the bombing was much closer. The men ran to the window on the other side. This time, the sound of bombs was coming from the camp's factories. Jacob watched as bomb after bomb hit the munitions plant. Each explosion lit the night sky like an enormous flame, followed by the eerie red glow of the damaged structure. About thirty

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seconds after the first bombs fell, incendiaries within the shipment area of the building began to explode. Jacob estimated that more than five thousand new artillery shells were in inventory, waiting for the trucks to take them away. The men cheered as another bomber dropped his load of living hell upon the rubber factory.

As his fellow prisoners cheered the bombing of the factories, Jacob returned to his bunk in dejection. *I had hoped to live longer than this.* Eli, the kapo, entered the room and sat on the floor next to Jacob. “What is wrong, Eli?”

Eli looked at Jacob for a long time before he spoke. “I don’t know, Jacob. I’m a realist. I know that the bombing mission was wonderful. I’m glad that we won’t be making any more bombs for the Germans. But, I also know that it puts our barracks one step closer to death. We are next for the Sonderkommando,” he cried.

Eli’s eyes welled up with tears. He instantly covered his face with his hands. “I’m so sorry, Jacob. I would rather go myself than see you go. But, I can’t change the list – I can only look at it!” Eli now sobbed openly in the dark corner of the rank barracks. Jacob moved to his side and put an arm around Eli’s shoulders. Eli looked up at Jacob, his tears reflecting light from the bulb above. “I wish that everything was different – and that I was never a kapo. How could I ever be so stupid? You see, they hate us just about as much as they hate you. How can I go on in life, knowing that I have cheated each person here? I feel like I really want to die, Jacob.”

Jacob allowed Eli to cry for several more minutes. Then, he pulled on Eli’s shoulder. He looked at Jacob through bloodshot eyes. Jacob smiled and patted his arm. “Don’t be sorry Eli. We all make decisions that we are embarrassed about. What is important is that you accept your guilt and make up for it with good acts during the rest of your life. In fact, if you stay near me, I think that you may have that opportunity soon. Can you do that, Eli?”

Eli suddenly saw the meaning of Jacob’s message and smiled. He trusted Jacob implicitly. “Yes, Jacob. I can do that.” As Jacob began to walk away, Eli pulled on his leg. “Will you help me, Jacob? Will you tell me when?” Jacob looked back and smiled. *I have just discovered one of my soldiers.*

As required, Jacob reported to the crematoria in his section of the camp for Sonderkommando duty. There were different Sonderkommandos groups, based upon a specific function. Some were assigned to welcome new arrivals, telling them that they were going to be disinfected and showered. Later, they told these new arriving prisoners, they would join relatives as part of work teams. They lied to them, suggesting the prisoners would be reunited with their families. Other teams moved the bodies from the gas chambers. These Sonderkommando were also assigned the task of extracting gold teeth and finding valuables. The first team would then take them to the crematoria for burning. Jacob was assigned to the team known as “Birkenau Two Sonderkommando.” Of course, he had never doubted that he would be assigned to the crematoria. His nightmare foretold it. Now, it had become reality. After five years of torture, forced labor, beatings and starvation, the nightmare that Jacob had experienced as a seventeen-year-old boy became reality.

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For days, Jacob and his fellow prisoners discussed a rebellion, as the Czechs had accomplished. They praised the courage and tenacity of the Czechs. They told each other that they, too, should find a way to hurt the Nazis. The old Rabbi said the brave Czechs of Sonderkommando Three must certainly now reside with God and the angels. Yet, without the munitions plant, where would they obtain gunpowder? By now, Jacob's dream was well known by the other prisoners. He told them to be patient. "We must survive until the time is right for us to act. Be patient. Do not throw your life away in vain. I promise you a chance to fight them. Wait for the right time."

As time passed, Jacob's health continued to deteriorate. He was now skin and bones, with a left knee that barely held his meager weight. His greatest fear was to be assigned to transport the bodies from the gas chamber to the ovens. Barely able to walk, Jacob was certain that he would not be able to carry another adult. If the Germans saw his weakness, he would have been put to death. Perhaps the Germans knew that Jacob was crippled. Perhaps that was why they assigned him to the ovens. Perhaps they were only pawns, performing the decisions necessary to fulfill God's plan for Jacob. As his terrifying nightmare so many years ago foretold, he had to stand and operate the crematorium loader for a nine-hour shift.

Jacob found that the worst part of his job occurred when the ashes in the crematorium were full. Then, he was forced to carry the heavy ashes to the Vistula River and dump them into the water. Jacob carried load upon load, with his left knee buckling and stabbing him with pain. Fortunately, Jacob's arms were still strong. But the imbalance between his miniscule diet and new caloric expenditures were devastating. The increasingly frigid weather made it worse. On many trips to the river, he wondered if he would return alive. His shoes were shards of torn leather, held together by flimsy strings. He prayed that they would hold together just a little while longer. Each evening, Jacob saw men who were without shoes examining their feet and toes. Frostbite was ubiquitous. The poor men's fingers and toes turned black. Many had gangrene. Jacob considered himself fortunate to have anything at all covering his feet.

There was another reason why Jacob was grateful that he had not been assigned to help the prisoners undress and to usher them into the gas chamber. He thought that he would rather die than have to coerce thousands of people into the gas chamber. Many men that he had known spoke of seeing friends or relatives in such queues. These thoughts terrified Jacob. *What could be worse than forcing a loving friend or relative to strip off their clothes, shear off their hair and push them and their children into a gas chamber where they will all die?* He began to understand why the average length for a Sonderkommando crew was about two or three months. After that time, the crew itself must have welcomed the gas chamber.

Jacob did his best to stay in touch with reality, while performing acts of incredible inhumanity day after day. He told himself that God had a plan for him. That was why he had been given his dream of premonition. The old Rabbi told him it was a divine message from God and he had to be prepared to act at a moment's notice. Simcha agreed and told Jacob that he had to survive to perform

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the work that God had planned for him.

Each day, Jacob watched as men around him fell into madness. *How long can we do such things before the strongest man is insane?* There were, however, a few benefits. The Sonderkommando with the most distasteful jobs were given extra food and sometimes liquor. In the Sonderkommando barracks, Jacob slept upon a straw mattress, a significant improvement from the bumpy wooden slat in his old barracks. The liquor was also a welcome diversion. The Sonderkommando were allowed to wash away the horror with alcohol.

Jacob's mind was reeling. The Germans were killing unneeded prisoners at breakneck speed. The extermination machinery was pressed to its fullest capability. Thousands of prisoners who had worked in the nearby factories were now killed daily. As fast as the gas chambers could dislodge their masses of bodies, new groups followed.

Jacob felt relieved, in a sense that he no longer had to play music to doomed prisoners. In nightmares, Jacob still recalled the faces that had passed before him while he played violin. Many of them looked up into the orchestra as they were playing. Jacob recalled how so many of them smiled while looking at him. He had wanted to stand up and scream at them to run away. *Get out of here. Run away! Don't stand there and smile at me! Can't you see that you are all about to be killed?* But in his dreams, Jacob was physically unable to stand up and shout at them. Each time he tried, he was mysteriously immobilized. Each time he opened his mouth to scream, no sound was emitted. Jacob always woke from these dreams trembling and drenched in perspiration. More than anything, Jacob recalled the innocent faces of the children standing in line for the gas chamber. They walked along, holding hands with their parents and grandparents as though they were going to synagogue, or on holiday. The children were generally pleasant, well mannered and obedient. They were unaware of their fate. Those faces tortured Jacob every night.

As Jacob looked into the eyes of the adults from the orchestra stand, he saw that most of them understood their destiny. Unlike the bright energetic smiles of the children, the adult smiles were mostly forlorn and sad in appearance. They looked anxious. A few seemed agitated. Many of these people were badly weakened by the effects of their long and painful journey. Most had been forced to stand upright in cattle cars on very long train rides. Sometimes a train dislodged prisoners from other camps. They often appeared near death as they stood obediently in queue. Jacob recalled how he had felt upon entering Auschwitz-Birkenau, although it now seemed ages ago. The Germans used starvation as a tool to keep the prisoners weak and unable to fight back. It would have been useless to fight back anyway. Those incoming prisoners who ran were simply shot before they could reach the electrified fences. They marched on in Jacob's dreams while he played Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert or Wagner. He wondered if he would ever be able to forget the smiles of the naive, doomed children.

Now, day after day, Jacob limped to the crematoria and forced the naked bodies of innocent people into the massive fire. He tried not to look at the faces of the victims. But, of course that was almost impossible. Some of the bodies reminded him of his own family or friends from school. His mind tenuously

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moved away from reality. He began to withdraw from other prisoners. Soon, Jacob began to feel as though his body had been taken over by another force. He understood that his own demise was near – perhaps no more than a month away. Each day he stared into the fire and longed for his own death. Yet, each evening he would re-read his father's letter and his courage returned.

The fire had become something of an important symbol to Jacob. Yet, he wasn't sure why. His mind seemed broken. Some days, he found it almost impossible to organize his thoughts at all. He had become numb to his horrible surroundings. He walked to and from buildings like an automaton. He threw bodies into the raging inferno as if they were no more than logs going into the family hearth. And, through it all, he was fighting to maintain his fragile concept of reality. It seemed as though a thousand conflicting feelings were soaring through his mind. *Am I chosen for something? Is there a purpose for me in this terrible mess?* Soon, Jacob began to feel as though he was destined to send these poor souls into their future – and the entrance to that future was through his particular porthole to the fire. As he stood there shoving body after body into the fire, Jacob's breaking mind told him that this was no ordinary opening into a fire. It was no ordinary fire. It had become some kind of gateway into eternity. It was now *Jacob's Fire*. Even if the Germans had been removed from this equation, he had begun to believe that he was chosen by God to guide these poor people into the hereafter. *Yet, what kind of God would send millions of his chosen people to their deaths? They certainly were innocent, were they not?* Each day, while helping to burn the bodies of thousands of his people, Jacob ruminated over these thoughts until he was certain that his head would explode.

As a snowstorm raged outside his barracks, Jacob's mind continued to drift away. He had always been a gregarious and fun-loving person. Now, he was a virtual recluse. He rarely spoke, and then only with the old Rabbi or Simcha. Jacob now wandered back and forth to work, as though hypnotized. He was lost in a dizzying battle between the meaning of his life and insanity. He had become a stranger to those who knew him. He was also increasingly frail. Jacob now weighed just over half his weight upon entering the camp. His skin clung to his bones, with almost no muscle in between. His eyes became dark and lifeless, set deep into his troubled face. His teeth continued to fall out. His skin had turned yellow – a sure sign of jaundice. And, he had begun to cough regularly. Jacob had the appearance of a walking skeleton. He moved about, but his mind was somewhere else.

His friends had also changed. Most of the prisoners he had known were barely able to maintain their sanity, despite unimaginable conditions. They baked during the oppressive summer heat and froze during the icy winters. They were starved, beaten, intimidated, ridiculed and experimented upon. They had been forced into hard manual labor, made to stand upright in lines for interminable amounts of time and forced to live in abject squalor. They shared cholera, small-pox, typhus, dysentery and every imaginable disease. When there was little work for them, they were the subject of all manner of wicked medical experiments – including surgery without the benefit of anesthesia.

Yet, in this lowest possible form of existence, the prisoners survived. And,

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the Jews never forgot who they were. They prayed in secret and worshipped regularly, celebrating the Sabbath and each of the Hebrew holidays. Jacob marveled at how such beaten, defeated prisoners waiting for their turn to die could continue to live as Jews. *God must surely love us.* Despite the murder of loved ones, constant beatings, humiliation, starvation and the duress of hard labor, the Jews of Auschwitz praised God. Jacob could not imagine how any humans could endure such intense hardships. And then he remembered a message from the Passover Seder. *“In every generation they rise up against us.”* Lying near death in a freezing barracks, Jacob marveled at people who had just lost everything that they had loved and valued in life and still found the capacity to worship God. He began to cry.

Jacob cried all night. He sobbed like he had never cried before in his life. Not a word was said, but surely everyone in the barracks heard him crying and moaning. He grieved for his dear parents. He sobbed for Rachael and their child. He cried for every poor, innocent person sent into this terrifying nightmare to die in foul squalor. He cried as he remembered the faces of the children pass by on their way to the gas chamber, while he played violin. He cried for an entire generation of Jews, condemned to a dreadful death for no logical reason – other than that they were Jews. For a while, Allied bombers hid Jacob’s cries for the poor, lost tribe of Israel, trapped here and waiting for their turn to die. He trembled in his bunk while the growling bombers drowned his moans and sobbing. As morning came, Jacob felt as though his life had been spent. He was dreadfully weak and no longer felt a reason to live. It was the lowest point of his young life.

Suddenly, he heard a mumbling from below and to the right. The old Rabbi had turned to face east, to pray. He placed his tattered, faded white and blue prayer shawl upon his head and began to recite the morning prayers. Another man joined in. Then, one after another, the men in Jacob’s barracks joined the old Rabbi in prayer. Their voices were physically weak, yet collectively strong in spirit. Jacob suddenly smiled. *This is something that the Nazis cannot take from us. Our love of God and family will never die. As long as some of us survive, we will go on living and loving the Torah. It will be my task to make sure that some of us survive.* Somehow, Jacob understood why the path of the Jewish people had become strewn with trepidation and death. Only God’s chosen people could enter the holy land. And, to be so purified – to be so holy – the chosen people must endure that which no other people will suffer. *If Hitler manages to destroy the Jews of Europe, others will survive. It is the indomitable spirit of being Jewish that keeps us going!* Jacob suddenly realized that individually, they meant nothing. But, as a group, they meant everything.

While those around him in the Sonderkommando unit became hardened to their jobs, Jacob began to discover the strength to maintain his focus. His friends became withdrawn. They worked, ate and slept. But, they never stopped praying. They never lost faith. As death drew near, their resolve remained. If Jacob could not lead them to safety, then they would die proud of their religion, with a prayer on their lips.

One night, after working his regular shift at the crematoria, Jacob walked into his barracks. To his great surprise, a table in the center of the room was

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covered with all manner of food and drink. There were loafs of bread, various types of cheese, smoked fish, salami, tomatoes – even fresh fruit. In the center of the table were bottles of whiskey, beer and seltzer. His fellow prisoners were busy devouring this pleasant surprise. Of course, they all ate and drank too much and regretted it the next morning. Still, Jacob was grateful for the food. The Germans continued to give the Sonderkommando this new sustenance. After all, the Jews were performing a job that few Germans could endure. Jacob's body slowly began to recover. He gained weight and began to think more clearly.

The problem with accepting such gifts from the Nazis was the guilt that followed. It was one thing to eat and drink at night, but another to push starving fellow-prisoners into the gas chamber the next day. Even hardened men had difficulty dealing with such feelings. But, very few of the Sonderkommando complained. They told each other that it was only natural to feed one's self in the face of starvation. And, they had no control over which prisoners were fed or starved. It was not their fault that the Germans fed them. And so, like everyone else, Jacob filled his mind with rationalizations and half-truths. Although he too felt tremendous guilt, he also knew that he had to stay alive in order to fight later.

The next night, Jacob lay in his bunk thinking about the meaning of his existence. He understood why God allowed him to survive when so many others had been killed. And, even though Jacob assumed that his life was almost over, he was grateful for his clarity of vision. It was all so suddenly clear to him. *I have little time left to live. Therefore, what I do with this limited time is greatly important. I can die like a mouse. Or, I can stand up for my people and lead a rebellion. And, if I die doing this, I will be just as dead as if I let the Nazis kill me in a gas chamber. I must die as a leader of men. I will find a way to get back at the Germans. Then, I will die with honor.*

Suddenly, Jacob felt as though a veil had been lifted over his life. Everything seemed to make sense. His delusions during the daytime were an artifact of the terrible job the Nazis had given him. *Yes, it is true that I must become a leader. But, leading souls through a German fire is not my calling. Rather, I must lead a rebellion against those who are exterminating my people. Everyone must die. I will make death worthy by using it to save my people. I am not Moses. But, I am Jacob Silverman. No, I am Yaakov, son of Moshe. And, my death will not be in vain!* He suddenly sat upright in his bunk, disturbing those nearby.

"What is it Jacob? Why are you getting up?" Jacob looked at the men near him. He saw that they were ravaged by disease and malnutrition. But, they could still hold a rifle or throw a grenade. He had to insure that they would not give up. As he looked around the barracks, he saw his friends. Some were new friends. Some he had known for years. Everyone from Salzburg was now gone. Jacob realized that he might be the only living Jewish survivor, besides Rachael. As he thought about Rachael, he realized that she was another reason for him to lead men in a revolt. If there was only a slim chance of success, he had to try to return to her and their child. For the first time in a very long time, Jacob smiled. A man next to him poked Jacob with his elbow. "What are you smiling about, Jacob?" He looked down and put his hand upon the man's head.

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“Otto, we are going to fight the Germans.” The startled men looked at Jacob, who had not spoken to them for days.

A young man nearby spoke. “But how can we fight them? We have no weapons.”

Jacob smiled again. “Don’t worry. Leave that part to me. When the time arrives, we will take weapons from the Nazis and we will shoot back.”

Jacob heard mumbling and some laughter in the barracks. Suddenly, he became angry. He shouted at them. “Who are you men?” Silence followed his scream. He had everyone’s attention. “Listen to me men. We all have to die. However, we don’t all have to walk into the Nazi gas chamber like sheep to a slaughter.” Suddenly an idea erupted in Jacob’s mind. His heart fluttered for a moment. The idea was so simple and yet so perfect. In an instant, the answer to his questions had arrived. Jacob paused and smiled again. His smile gave the appearance to the other men that he truly did have a solution to their dire predicament. Although Jacob was excited, he also realized that his next words would be of great importance. He calmed himself and began to speak in a firm, yet quiet voice.

“All of you have heard rumors about the Allies progress. We can hear artillery from the east almost every night. The Russians are drawing close. You have also heard rumors about the Germans moving us. That would make sense. The Nazis will do everything they can to destroy the evidence of their crimes here. When they move us, they will be vulnerable. Think about it, men. There are still tens of thousands of us here – men and some women. The Germans will try to move us west. When they do, look out! They won’t have enough strength to cover all of us at the same time. To make matters worse for them, they will have to use the best troops fighting on the front, not guarding a bunch of poor, defenseless prisoners. Think about this, men! The Germans will never assign armored divisions to guard diseased, decimated, defenseless prisoners. They will deploy those divisions where they are needed most. When they move us, they will use a bare minimum of military strength.” He noted with satisfaction that most of the men in the barracks nodded their heads in agreement.

As Jacob spoke, a vision appeared in his mind. Never before had this happened. It was as though a movie was playing inside his head. Jacob shook his head and blinked his eyes hard, as though clearing away cobwebs after a fall. But, the vision was still there! He looked down upon an expansive winter countryside surrounding a long line of shuffling prisoners, as though he was watching from a cloud! In that vision, Jacob saw himself trudging through snowy roads with the surviving prisoners. This motley group of emaciated prisoners stretched from horizon to horizon.

Looking to the side, Jacob saw a long line of bright red. He recognized that it was blood running through the gutter in the side of the road. He looked back and saw many bodies along the road, each wearing the red and white striped pajamas of Auschwitz prisoners. They dead prisoners were mostly old, weak and diseased. Jacob instantly understood that the Nazis had shot them because they were unable to keep up with the pace of the march. Most importantly, Jacob saw that the Germans were guarding the ragtag line of prisoners with a small detach-

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ment of disheveled soldiers. He saw that very few of them were SS. Most of the guarding troops were regular army. A closer look revealed old men and teenagers. These were the bottom of the barrel of the German army. They had little or no actual combat experience. He had no idea how he understood these things. Yet, Jacob knew them to be true. It was another vision from God. *This will be our escape!* Adolescents and old men will guard us! Jacob saw, in a flash of perception, how he could lead his fellow prisoners to safety. They would select the right place and time, and then attack the poorly trained and inexperienced guards.

Slowly and carefully, Jacob explained this scenario to his men. As he described how he would lead the men to escape, he slowly stood up, so that each man in the barracks would be able to look upon his face. "We can fight for our lives. But, we must wait until the time is right. We must wait until after they have started to move us." As he spoke, more images poured into his brain. He saw a railroad yard. He saw prisoners walking into cattle cars. Many of the cars were open, the roofs having collapsed over time. The trains took them Southwest, over snow-covered mountain passes. The trains took them *towards Austria!* As they emerged from the trains in this land enveloped by mountains, the time for action emerged. It would be then, after they left the railroad station, that Jacob would lead his rebellion. *All we will require is an outcrop of rocks or a cave for protection!*

All of this appeared to Jacob in his mind, as swiftly as a movie. Jacob shuddered as he wondered where these thoughts came from. He was humbled by the realization that a higher power was at work. Yet, he was afraid to say this to the men now hanging upon his every word. "I tell you, with everything I know to be true in life. We will escape from death. If you will follow me and if you will fight for your freedom, we can survive!" The barracks erupted into thunderous applause along with much whooping and screaming. Everyone was committed to the new plan – even Eli, the kapo. No one slept that night in Jacob's Sonderkommando barracks. The men excitedly discussed Jacob's vision for rebellion. The group could not have been more committed.

Men would later say, when retelling their heroic story, that they saw a faint glow around Jacob's head while he described their path to freedom. Others would say that they saw a glow in Jacob's blue eyes during his visions. Some said that they could feel the ground tremble as Jacob told of his plan. Regardless, rumors filled the camp the next day of a young man in the crematoria crew who experienced a vision of redemption for the Jewish prisoners. Every prisoner who had heard the story passed it along. Sometimes Jacob's name, the name of the barracks or the circumstances of the meeting changed. Yet, the rumor persisted. Suddenly thousands of prisoners believed that if they could survive a little longer, a chance for escape would arrive under Jacob's leadership. His vision was alive and spreading. He had given the prisoners some hope. And, hope can be dangerous. More importantly, he had implanted the desire to act against their oppressors. Almost forgotten had been the bravado that came from stories of the Warsaw ghetto, or the brave Czechs who had destroyed their crematoria. Suddenly, there was optimism among those who had lost all hope for survival. Those who

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knew Jacob insisted that God had given him a “sign.” They said that Jacob foretold a moment when the Jews would act and fight back against their Nazi enemy. It would become a modern David and Goliath story.

Jacob lay awake in his bunk. The freezing wind howled outside. The rafters of the barracks creaked and moaned against the gale. As usual, before he fell asleep, he prayed for the safety of Rachael and their child. But, this night Jacob also prayed for the success of his “mission.” Like it or not, Jacob had started something that had spread like wildfire among the surviving prisoners. He had given tortured, hopeless people something very dangerous to their enemy – optimism. He foretold a time when the Germans would be weak. He predicted a moment when they could strike back. Jacob smiled as he thought of this. Whatever the result, he had given this group of terrified, malnourished, diseased people belief in themselves, belief that they could escape. And, even if escape was impossible, he had given them hope that they could die defending their people, instead of being slaughtered like helpless sheep. “We are no longer sheep,” he muttered before falling asleep.

Chapter 57

Leaving Auschwitz

In the early morning of January 17th, Jacob was alone in his barracks. He watched as his fellow-prisoners walked back through the frigid air from the commissary. Suddenly, the door opened and the barracks' kapo, Eli Rothstein, walked in. He stomped his feet to remove the attached snow and ice. Looking up, he saw Jacob, lying upon his cot. "I can't recall such a severe January. Can you, Jacob?"

Jacob motioned for Eli to sit next to him. "What's happening, Eli?" Eli looked uncomfortable.

After a long pause, Eli looked at Jacob. "Jacob, I've heard that we are to leave the camp tomorrow."

Jacob was taken by surprise. "What did you say? Where are we to go? Eli looked down at the floor.

Finally, he spoke again. "All that I can tell you, Jacob, is that every prisoner able to walk must leave, starting tomorrow. The camp will be closed. Jacob, I will gladly do whatever you ask." Jacob marveled at how Eli, who had been feared and hated among the prisoners, was now a trusted friend to all. *Eli has come so far among us. Never before has someone changed so much and so fast. He was our enemy and he is now our friend!*

In early November, just two months earlier, Jacob had walked into the barracks and found Eli battered and bleeding upon the hard, dark dirt floor. He had been beaten within an inch of his life. A group of nine or ten men surrounded him. Some of them had pieces of wood or glass in their hands. "What's happening here?" Jacob demanded. As the men looked at Jacob, he saw hate in their eyes.

"We're giving this Nazi-loving kapo what he deserves," said one man.

Another man spoke. "Rothstein used to be a Jew, but now he works for the Nazis. We should kill him." Several of the men nodded in agreement and began moving towards Eli. One of the men picked Eli up and held him while the others took turns punching him.

Suddenly, the sound of Jacob's voice could be heard shouting. "Stop this now!" he demanded. The men looked back at him with curiosity. "Before you kill him, perhaps you should ask if he still wishes to aid the Nazis. And, perhaps you should ask yourselves if you have ever made a mistake or done something that you now regret. We are all humans. That means we all make mistakes."

Jacob's comment was met by stunned silence from the group. He walked over and grabbed Eli away from the man holding him. Tears were streaming down Eli's face, mixing with blood from his nose. Jacob shouted at him. "Tell us why you became a kapo." Eli's eyes were wide open with fear. "Before these men kill you, they should know how you feel about what you have done."

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Eli's nose was broken and bleeding badly. He also had a cut over his left eye and a large bruise over the right side of his temple. His shirt was torn open and huge bruises were visible around his ribs on both sides. Blood trickled out of his mouth. Eli began to speak, nervously looking in every direction. "I couldn't take the starvation any longer. So, I signed up as a kapo. I've done some unspeakable things – things that I feel terrible about. My God, I am a Jew and yet... I've helped those pigs that kill Jews for fun. You want to know how I feel about it? I want to die. I deserve to be killed for what I've done." The prisoners looked at each other with uncertainty. Eli's confession had taken the edge away from their hatred.

Jacob, still holding Eli by the shirt collar, spoke loudly to the men. "Is there a man here who has never made a mistake in his life? If so, step forward and I will let you kill Eli." The men shuffled their feet and looked down at the floor. Jacob was not finished. "Is there a man here who can save Eli's life with compassion for his mistake?" The men slowly put their hand-made weapons down. Fists were relaxed and the hostility was at an end. But, Jacob was still not done. "Stop!" The men stood at attention. Jacob was surprised at how easy it was to lead them. "How would you feel about Eli if he could help us now? How would you feel about him if he could spy for us? How would you feel if Eli could help us hurt the Nazis?" The group of angry, violent men became docile. Now think!" Jacob screamed at the group. "Think about ways that Eli could spy on the Nazis." During the next few minutes, they discovered that a wealth of information could be obtained, if only Eli would be willing to work for them, instead of against them.

The German guards entrusted Eli with keys to virtually every room in the camp. Since he had been beaten, Eli had gone into the Commandant's office four times. Each time, he came back with vital information about the camp and its leadership. He took railroad schedules, military maps, camp personnel data and even a pistol left upon a chair. He was even planning to take the commandant's radio. With each passing day, Eli had become more of a hero than a villain. Soon, the men had grown to respect his bravery. He had finally become one of them. Jacob had saved Eli, in every way that a man could be saved.

Eli became an extraordinary spy for the prisoners. In front of the guards, Eli maintained his appearance as a brutal kapo. Behind their backs, he stole every piece of military information possible. Jacob's leadership was beginning to produce significant results. He was now one of the most trusted leaders within the prisoner population. His reputation for shaping the minds of people was rock solid. Jacob had turned bakers, teachers and businessmen into spies and fighters. His verbal skills were remarkable. No one doubted his courage. And, even for someone so young, he was respected for his wisdom. Long gone was that shy, immature boy from Salzburg. Jacob had earned their faith when he was able to smuggle critical information out of the camp. He had justified their confidence because of his brave escape from Theresienstadt. He gained their admiration for fighting with the partisans. He endured torture, disease, deprivation and finally the disgrace of being a Sonderkommando. Yet now, everyone looked up to Jacob, despite his age. He had become a leader of men.

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On the evening of January 17th, Jacob called Eli Rothstein to his side. He spoke quietly, so that others could not listen. "Eli, if we are to be moved to another camp, what is to happen to those not physically able to march for miles?" Jacob had visions of the SS arriving and shooting the tens of thousands of prisoners who would be physically unable to go out on a forced march. "Will those unable to walk be killed?"

Eli's face was dark with trepidation. "I don't know, Jacob. They did not tell me that." Jacob's mind was now spinning. Clearly, any people who could deliberately kill tens of thousands of innocent people would have no problem exterminating those who were not able to march from the camp. *What if the Germans mean to kill all remaining prisoners? What if they lied to kapos to prevent a mass uprising?*

But, even as Jacob thought about fighting to save the lives of his fellow prisoners, he realized how feeble they were. "Eli, where are they taking us?" The expression on Eli's face told Jacob that he truly did not know.

Suddenly, Eli began to cry. He sobbed uncontrollably for several minutes at Jacob's feet. Finally, Jacob pulled Eli up from the cold, bare dirt floor in the gloomy barracks. Eli managed to sit on the cot next to Jacob. Tears streamed down his face. He tried to speak, but the sobbing continued. After a while, he seemed to gain control. "Jacob, please do not hate me for what I have done." He shuddered and caught his breath again. "Jacob, I never wanted to help the Germans. I'm Jewish, just like you. I know that the Germans will kill me right after they kill the other prisoners." Eli returned to sobbing again for a few minutes.

Finally, Jacob pulled Eli up so that they were face-to-face. "Then, why did you agree to become a kapo, Eli?"

Through the continuing tears, Eli fought to speak. "Jacob, I just couldn't stand the hunger any longer. You see, my father was a butcher in our village. Every day, he brought home more food than we could eat. My family encouraged me to eat four or five times a day. Since meat was plentiful, and my father bartered meat for other types of food, I was always well fed. So, when the Nazis starved me, it was really torture. By the time I had those severe pains in my stomach from our starvation diet here, I ..." Eli again lost control and another crying fit ensued. At length, Eli spoke again. "Please Jacob, do not hate me. I just needed the extra food that kapos receive here." Jacob glanced up and saw tears running down Eli's face. The meanest, toughest person in the camp now cried like a baby, his body shuddering – his breath arriving in gasps.

Jacob put his arms around Eli as he cried and his body shook with raw emotion. Finally, he looked into Eli's eyes. "I forgive you, Eli. I know how painful it is to be starved. Eli squeezed Jacob until he could no longer breathe. Pulling himself away from Eli, their eyes met again. Jacob had converted this kapo to his side. Perhaps there would be more. "Now, listen to me. You have changed in the last few weeks. Instead of helping the Germans, you have spied on them. You have given us much needed information. If you wish to make retribution for your aid to the Germans, there will be plenty of time for it. And, the Nazis still trust you! They have no idea that you've been spying on them."

Jacob paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. "I intend to make a

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stand against the Germans, Eli. We Jews have given our lives too readily to these Nazi monsters. What we must do now is find a way to fight back. Eli, will you fight alongside of me?"

Eli looked into Jacob's eyes and smiled. "Of course, Jacob. I want to fight them. I *must* fight them." Excitement returned to Eli's eyes as they sparkled for the first time in years. "Yes, Jacob. Please tell me how to fight. If they plan to kill us all anyway, we might as well die fighting!"

Jacob marveled at the transformation of this anguished middle-aged Jew. Only weeks earlier, Eli had been a stammering, angry, brutal man, obeying the orders of his Nazi captors blindly. Yet, Jacob had been able to transform him into a courageous fighter. *If this sniveling shell of a man can be changed into a fighter, then so can others at Auschwitz.* The concept exploded through Jacob's mind like fireworks in a dark night. *This is my calling. This is why I am here! I must lead these poor, broken, starving civilians against one of the world's most formidable military forces. If we are all to die because we are Jewish, then let us die fighting for God and our people – for our survival as a people! This is my life's work! We will find a way to hurt the Germans before they kill us!*

Suddenly, Jacob felt more alert than at any time in his life. Every nerve tingled with excitement. In a flash, all of his life's experiences seemed to lead to this moment. He understood with a thundering awakening that he was meant to lead these few remaining starving Jews to glorious victory or valiant death. He mumbled, "Better to die fighting than to go as sheep to the slaughter."

Jacob's mind again envisioned that long line of prisoners, walking through a vast frozen countryside. There was something vulnerable about the small force of Germans who guarded the prisoners. Indeed, the Nazis had weapons that the prisoners lacked. However, if the lines were long and the Germans were forced to extend their resources, an opportunity for a successful battle might arrive. "Eli, if you had a gun in your hands, would you kill these Nazi criminals?" His answer was revealed in the bright smile upon Eli's face. "Yes, Jacob. I would fight them. I would kill them! Please, just give me the chance!" Jacob smiled as he realized that there was still a fighting spirit in Eli. And, if Eli would fight, then certainly most of the prisoners he knew would fight.

That night, as he lay awake waiting for sleep, Jacob's body tingled with anticipation. Not since his first days as a partisan had he been this excited. Every nerve in his body quivered with eagerness. If the Nazis really were about to take the remaining prisoners from the camp, he would be ready. And, somewhere on that journey, an opening for revolt would arrive. His entire life had been but a prelude for the upcoming moment when he would spring into action. Jacob's destiny was to lead this band of unarmed, pathetic prisoners in rebellion against their well-armed Nazi oppressors. He realized that this might lead to his death. But, what better way to die than by standing up for your people and their freedom? For far too long, his Jewish brethren had gone to their deaths without a fight. Before he drifted into a restless sleep, Jacob prayed for the physical and mental strength necessary to lead men into battle.

On January 19th, Jacob and the few remaining men in his barracks were called out for roll call as usual at 5:30 a.m. Jacob steeled himself for another day

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of intense manual labor. But, the glare of the spotlights revealed a new crew of SS, rather than the regular German guards. These new soldiers were very different. They seemed either too young or too old. They were assisted by dozens of raging German shepherd and Doberman dogs. The youngsters and old men barked out orders and screamed at the prisoners, as though their lives depended upon it.

After their meager breakfast of gruel and a stale crust of bread, the prisoners reassembled for the day's work. They stood still as someone played the cracked old record of the German national anthem. While the prisoners stomped their feet and walked in pace in a vain effort to stay warm, few noticed that the guards were marching a large group of prisoners out of the camp. At the same time, they were joined by what appeared to be an armored infantry brigade. The soldiers and their perpetually growling dogs made the prisoners nervous. "It's the beginning of the end," said an old man behind Jacob. "They are going to march us into the forest and shoot us all."

Shortly after the second roll call of the day, the prisoners were marched to the gate. Jacob's group was told to wait for other groups to assemble. This was without precedent and completely extraordinary. The Germans never allowed many prisoners to group together at the same time. Jacob turned around to steal a glance at the rest of the camp. He was shocked to see prisoners lined up before every barracks in use. Tens of thousands of prisoners were grouped together! Jacob realized with certainty that this was the end of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He would not be going to work there again.

The guards looked nervous as they too stamped their feet upon the ground in an effort to stay warm. The prisoners, without hats, coats or gloves were in danger of hypothermia and frostbite. Many of them had no shoes. They wrapped cloth around their bare feet. There they stood in roll call formation for hours, wearing only the flimsy striped pajamas, issued to all prisoners. One by one, prisoners began to succumb to the cold and fell to the ground. It was forbidden to help a fellow prisoner. Jacob had seen many men shot for helping a fallen friend or relative. Many of those who fell to the ground died of the cold within minutes. Their dead eyes stared up at the living, pleading endlessly for another chance at life.

Never before had so many prisoners been assembled together. *No wonder the Germans are making a great show with their SS armored brigade. They want to frighten us and keep us in submission!* Soon, Jacob could see and hear other groups forming lines behind his group. Everyone watched in amazement, as the Nazis continued to assemble an enormous line of prisoners. It was dangerous, but every few minutes Jacob turned around and looked behind his group. Prisoners were lined up as far as he could see. A young man standing to Jacob's side remarked, "They are emptying the camp."

Jacob's heart began to pound heavily in his chest. "Yes," he said to the young man. "I believe that you are right." He glanced to his right and saw that the young man was crying. "What's your name?"

The young man sniffled and wiped his nose upon his sleeve. "My name is Yanik." Jacob shook his head from side to side, offering a disapproving look. "No, Yanik. What's your Hebrew name?"

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The small man with a runny nose smiled briefly. “My Hebrew name is Isaac.” Jacob smiled broadly for a moment. “Well, Isaac, my name is Jacob. And, this time we are going to fight back.”

Yanik’s eyes lit up. “So, you are the famous Jacob from Austria!” He was excited and animated. Yet, he also looked confused. “How can we fight back? We have no weapons.”

With a snarling expression, Jacob replied. “You mean we have no weapons *yet*. Some time soon, we will have a chance to escape. Stay close to me. When the time comes, you will be ready, eh?” The young man smiled back at Jacob. *He is my first conscript of the day.*

Jacob stared into the slate-gray sky. A steady, biting wind drove into him, making his left knee ache intensely. Jacob played the brave leader well. Yet, he realized that he still sometimes harbored doubts. Ideas swirled through his consciousness. *Is there a God? Can there be a God, who would let this happen to his chosen people? What have we done to deserve this extermination? How will I be remembered? My life means nothing. My actions mean everything. We must no longer be led to slaughter. Every battle requires a leader. I shall be that leader. I pledge my life to defend the people of Israel.* He looked down into the dirty snow. The man in front of him had no shoes or socks. He had torn some pieces of cloth around his feet. His toes and heels stuck out. His toes had already turned black, in contrast with his legs and feet. They were as white as bones. The man shivered in his spot, arms wrapped around himself. *How far do we have to walk? I fear that most of us won’t make more than a few miles. Where are they taking us?*

An hour after the second roll call of the day, Jacob watched in fear as guards pulled the sick and weak prisoners out of line. Most of them were too feeble to walk very far on their own. Within a few minutes, these invalids were marched across the parade ground to a freshly dug trench. To his amazement, Jacob saw a line of female prisoners join the men at the trench. The women were in the same decrepit condition. Some were barely able to stand at all. They leaned against the prisoner to their side. Here they stood, under the silver canopy of a winter’s dreary sky. *Who are these people? Why did the Germans bring them here to work, to be tortured and to die? What did they do to deserve this?* Jacob prayed silently for them.

Everyone understood that the Germans meant to kill these people. It had become routine at the camp to see a long line of prisoners shot at the edge of a trench. This happened whenever the gas chambers were not in operation. Jacob recalled seeing the same mass killing at Theresienstadt. *How long ago was that? Has it been three or four years?* Jacob was disturbed with his poor memory. Most of the veteran prisoners had become numbed to such mass shootings. In a way, it was a gift. The gas chamber could take as long as eight or nine minutes to kill a prisoner. A bullet in the head was a blessing.

Standing in a long line at the edge of the pit, the prisoners were now being shot by the new guards. One-by-one, the sick, old and frail prisoners were shot and fell into the trench. Some of the prisoners held hands, until it was their turn. When the wind diminished, Jacob could hear the men saying Kaddish, their final

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prayer before dying. Others could be heard saying the Shema – the prayer in which Jews profess their belief in the one, true God. None of them ran or attempted escape. For them, death was a welcome release from their torture. Jacob listened to these brave souls pray as they were each shot in the back of the head by a guard with a pistol. The guard had to reload often, making the process time consuming.

After some time, an officer arrived. He was young, tall and imposing. The officer began to scream about the slow pace of the killing. Moments later, four soldiers with machine guns began to shoot the remaining prisoners. Within seconds, the prisoners were gone and the soldiers were shoveling dirt over the bodies in the trench.

Around mid-morning, under a slate gray sky, the Germans marched 60,000 prisoners out of the camp. To Jacob's dismay, the Germans again split up the prisoners. Two groups marched to the Southwest. Two more groups marched due West. Jacob's group headed to the Southwest. He overheard an officer say that a group was to be marched "toward Wodzislaw," more than twenty kilometers away, where they would be "put on freight trains to other camps." *Other death camps. They will march us until we die. And, if we survive, we will simply be killed in a different death camp.*

Birkenau, along with its incredible toll of torture and death, was to be abandoned. Jacob imagined that the Germans had burned or transferred all records of gassings, shootings, torture and medical experiments. Of course, they would deny their actions if captured by the Allies. *What happened to all of the evidence that I collected about the camp? Where is it? Did Rachael take it to the Allies? If so, why have they done nothing?* Jacob now felt the need to survive more acutely. Beyond the need to see Rachael and the baby, he realized that he had to survive for a higher calling. He had to survive to be witness to this travesty of human hatred. The world might not believe a handful of survivors. Now, more than ever, Jacob's plan to fight the Germans was critical. *The testimony of victims of Nazi atrocities might prevent such a future catastrophe!*

At the end of the road, where it split into three other roads, Jacob turned around for one final glance at the place where he had been held prisoner for almost three years. It was the place where his parents, and many good friends were killed. Now, looking back at it, Jacob felt only anger. It was a deeply ingrained hatred for those who created this place of unspeakable torture and death. He shivered, but not from the biting cold. He shivered all the way down to his soul. Jacob prayed that there would never again be such a place on earth.

Eli, the kapo, walked next to Jacob. When the guards were not near, they exchanged whispered conversations about when and how to take action against the Germans. Although the prisoners appeared to be guarded by an armored regiment, the Germans were strung out along a very long line. Inside the camp, they appeared as a large, powerful detachment with tanks and other armor. Now, after they had been split up and extended along at least two kilometers, they appeared vulnerable. The soldiers were relaxed as they marched next to the prisoners. After all, they had nothing to fear from these poor, miserable listless prisoners. Jacob saw only one tank and three armored personnel carriers with

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their group. Several dozen soldiers rode in trucks that were dispersed intermittently throughout the long line. The rest of the guards marched with the prisoners. They carried rifles, but not much else. Jacob moved close to Eli and whispered. "When we stop, pass the word along to everyone that you can trust. Tell them to wait for me to decide the best place and time. Then, upon my action, they are to attack every nearby guard and confiscate their weapons." As Eli pulled away, Jacob grasped his arm and pulled him close again. "Tell them that *we must* acquire as many guns as possible. We'll also need grenades. But they must do *nothing* until my signal." Eli smiled and drifted back into his position in line.

As the day wore on, the sick and old prisoners began to fall behind. They were closely watched by the guards. By midday, the weakest prisoners had fallen very far behind the last part of Jacob's group. The guards did not hesitate in their action. An old man was losing his ability to walk. Not only had he slowed drastically, but his gait was uneven and wobbly. Jacob walked backwards so that he could watch. The man was probably in his seventies. He was bald, but had a long, scraggly white beard. *Look at his eyes!* Jacob almost stopped in his place in line. The old man's eyes were as blue as the sky on a clear summer day. They were so brightly blue, that to Jacob they seemed to glow. *Who is this old man? I've never seen him before – anywhere. How did he get here?* Jacob was aghast. He felt something pulling him towards this poor disheveled old man. Somehow, he felt connected to him. *What is he doing here?*

Suddenly, a young guard grabbed the old man under his armpit and around his back, dragging him off the side of the road. There, in a filthy ditch, he roughly dropped the old man. The old man realized what was happening to him and quickly stood up. He said nothing, but tore off his shirt, as if to demonstrate his muscles. Instead, it revealed his hollow stomach and skeletal ribs. His startling blue eyes were haunting, all the more because they were set deep within the black circles of chronic malnutrition. His spindly, white arms hung at his sides. Still, Jacob felt that peculiar pull towards this pitiful old man. *Am I supposed to do something?* Suddenly, the old man saw Jacob and their eyes met. For a long moment, they simply stared at each other. Jacob felt as though the old man was looking directly through his soul. It was the most eerie feeling that Jacob had experienced.

Then, to Jacob's amazement, the old man started talking to him. Jacob turned and looked around to see if the old man could be talking to someone else. After all, Jacob had never met the poor old man before. Yet, no one else was looking at the old man. He continued to repeat the same two words. The old man was saying, "*Save them. Save them. Save them.*"

Jacob was completely transfixed by the experience. He could no more look away than stop breathing. A shiver went down through his neck into his spine and down his back. He stopped breathing. He was so transfixed that he stopped walking without realizing it. The young guard unholstered his pistol. He released the safety and cocked the pistol's chamber, driving the first bullet into it. Slowly, he approached the old man, who continued to stare at Jacob, repeating those same two haunting words. Jacob began to scream at the old man. "Please, come here. Start walking!" But, the old man stayed on the edge of the

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road. He never saw the approaching officer. With all of his energy Jacob took in as much air as possible and screamed at the top of his lungs. "Please walk here!" The officer calmly walked to the old man and pointed his pistol at the back of his head. The old man suddenly stopped talking. Jacob watched as the old man's breath swirled out from his nostrils and moved swiftly over the broken corn stalks in the narrow gutter off the road. The old man closed his eyes, smiled and held his breath. Suddenly, the pistol rocked in the officer's hand. A flash emerged from the gun, along with a puff of smoke. The old man's head rocked violently to the left and down as he crumpled into a heap of bones and skin. He became just another body in a long line of innocent bodies.

Jacob was heartbroken. He fell to his knees, without caring about the stabbing pain that emerged from his left knee. The pain in his heart was much worse. *Somehow, that poor old man knew that I have a purpose in this outlandish nightmare.* Jacob believed that God spoke to him through this poor, innocent old man. And, his soul was strengthened because of the message. *He is with God now.* Jacob forced himself to turn away as he heard laughter from behind. The two guards were laughing about something. One of them pointed to the old man and did a pantomime of his death, splaying his arms about and rolling his eyes up into his head. The other guard apparently found it amusing. Jacob did not. *I will kill these Nazi pigs when the time arrives.*

Soon, the sound of prisoners being executed could be heard throughout the long line. Every minute or two a shot rang out. Jacob, who had fallen in line near the rear of the march, began to see more and more bodies along the side of the road. By mid-afternoon, the ditch along the side of the road had begun to run red with blood. It was the long red line from Jacob's vision. *This is a bloody march of death.* The Germans were executing anyone who was unable to maintain the pace of the march. He walked past dozens of prisoners whose life had been snuffed out because they could not keep pace with the healthier prisoners. Men and women of all ages lay in bloody heaps on the side of the road. Jacob's left knee was terribly painful. His limp was more pronounced than ever. But, he knew that he would be shot if he could not keep up. To keep his mind off of his pain, he thought about Rachael and their baby. *Where are they? What are they doing?*

The pace of the march never weakened, despite the brutal weather. The guards forced the prisoners to sing popular German songs. Anyone caught not singing was shot. They reached a small town late in the afternoon. As they approached the village, the Germans made the group sing louder, in an effort to impress the civilians. The road soon turned into rough cobblestone. There were buildings on both sides. It began to snow. Jacob could not recall being this cold. His very bones were freezing. He could no longer feel his toes and his fingers were numb.

The small town harbored buildings of all kinds; a church, a grocery, an open-air market, a pharmacy, a bakery, barbershop, auto repair shop and a bank. However, there were very few villagers to be seen. They walked past a small cemetery next to the church. On the edge of town there was a livery with stalls for horses. Jacob had to look down for fear of tripping or twisting his knee. Yet,

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he was soon able to hear a strange sound coming from the buildings. It sounded like someone banging pieces of wood together. Looking up and ahead into the town, Jacob saw the reason for the sound.

As the residents of the town realized who was marching through the street, they each slammed shut their shutters facing the street. Jacob smiled. *These people are repelled by us. We sicken and frighten them. After all, their leaders have told them that we are vermin – like rats. We are poison. We are intent upon raping their daughters and killing everyone who isn't Jewish. That's what they believe about us.*

Then, Jacob saw something flying through the air into the crowd of prisoners ahead. A prisoner caught it. Suddenly, everyone near that prisoner converged upon him. Then, it happened again. Several times, Jacob saw objects fly through the air. As he entered the center of town, he saw one of the shutters on a building to his left open briefly. An arm moved through the opening, flinging something into the crowd of prisoners just ahead. Just as Jacob reached the same house, it happened again. This time, Jacob caught the object. It was a small loaf of bread! *Some of the residents of this town are trying to give us food!*

Jacob pulled the bread apart and distributed it equally among the prisoners nearby. It was still warm as it entered Jacob's mouth. Never before had any food tasted so good. Jacob's stomach growled and lurched in anticipation of the food. As he slowly ate, Jacob tried to piece together what had just happened. It would seem that not all of Hitler's constituents hate Jews after all. *It must have taken a great deal of courage for those people to feed us.* Jacob imagined what the Gestapo might do to these courageous Poles. *Some of them don't hate us!* Jacob began to cry as he realized that there were still some good people, especially under such demanding circumstances. Tears of joy welled up over his eyelids, leaving streaks of dirt upon his face.

As the long line of prisoners left the small town, the cobblestones disappeared. Looking back, Jacob saw the shutters opening again along side of the street. Heads poked out and stared at the prisoners. Townspeople began talking to each other. The "danger" of the Jewish prisoners had passed. He wondered what would happen to those who threw food at the prisoners. *Will they now be ostracized from everyone else? Will they be punished for their compassion?*

About a kilometer later, after all of the prisoners had passed through the town, the prisoners were allowed to stop and rest next to the road. For the first time in many hours, Jacob was able to rest his knee. It was a blessing. Sitting in the gutter next to the road, Jacob groaned as he flexed his left leg. He stared absently at the open countryside. This was fertile Polish farmland, with acre after acre plowed and tilled. Dormant corn plants stood as mute sentries over the vast fields, giving way ultimately to wheat and barley. Beyond the fields, Jacob saw orchards in the distance. In the summer, this would be an idyllic scene. But now, snow covered everything – except for the red stream of death that flowed in the gutter next to the road. As Jacob looked back towards the village, he saw bodies distributed unevenly next to the road. Where each victim was shot, a pool of bright red blood had melted through the snow. Like an evil Hansel and Gretel, the guards had left a trail of bodies and blood behind them. *Who will remove and*

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destroy the bodies if there are no more prisoners? Jacob absently wondered how many of the thousands of prisoners on this death march would survive. *All the more reason to fight. We might as well die defending ourselves.*

While the prisoners stopped to rest, Jacob saw Eli move from one man to another, and then to another. Each time, he whispered something. And, each time the men nodded their heads affirmatively. *He's recruiting my soldiers. Eli is very brave to do this.* Jacob recalled his recent conversation with Eli. As a kapo, he aided the Nazis. It left him with crippling guilt. Now, he had changed sides. He would fight the Germans to the death.

After almost half an hour, Eli returned to Jacob excited and out of breath. "Jacob, you have no idea how many men and women will follow your lead. I spoke with more than forty people who will take guns away from the Nazis. But, I believe that at least twice that many will follow when we begin our attack." Eli, still looking for forgiveness looked pleadingly into Jacob's eyes.

Jacob smiled. "Nice work, Eli." He patted Eli's shoulders and grinned. Eli was so excited that he could hardly be restrained.

"When will we attack, Jacob?"

Jacob paused, looking up and around at the area ahead. "We cannot attack until we have a defensible position. Out in the open, their machine guns will cut us to pieces. Open farm land like this is impossible for our needs. But, when the land narrows, such as a bluff or cliff – that's when we'll make our move. Eli, you must tell everyone to be very patient. I will not begin a massacre of my own people."

Eli nodded and looked around. "You're right Jacob. I will tell them."

As Eli started to get up, Jacob pulled him back. Looking directly into his eyes, Jacob whispered, "Thank you Eli. You are a hero of the Jewish people."

Eli stood up straight and – for the first time – smiled with confidence.

Chapter 58

Rachael's Struggle To Survive

The morning of January 19th was below zero for most of Europe. And, while Jacob stood in roll call line, Rachael awoke alone in darkness. She had been in a deep sleep in which she had several dreams. In each dream, Jacob was fighting against an unseen enemy. And, each time, he had been shot and killed. She awoke with a terrible sense of dread. Trembling uncontrollably from the freezing cold, Rachael sat up – and instantly hit her head on the ceiling. It took a moment for her mind to clear as the sun's first rays tinged the dark sky pink. She was inside a chicken coop. As she moved, a sharp pain in her side made her scream. She stifled it as best she could.

Suddenly, it all came back to her. She remembered the harrowing escape from Auschwitz and starving in the forest with Paul. Then, she remembered Paul taking a bullet that should have killed her. His daring bravery made her cry. She fought against the guilt and tears unsuccessfully. Rachael put her hand inside her blouse, touching the bullet wound. It came out covered with dark, clotted blood. Rachael prayed that the bullet did not strike any important internal organs.

Rachael was famished. As quickly as possible, she ate every egg that she could find. The slippery, wet eggs felt strange, but they filled her empty, ravenous stomach. She was very grateful to have her hunger abated, at least temporarily. It took several minutes to exit the chicken coop, as each movement caused a sharp pain where she had been shot. Little by little, she edged her way to the door. Finally, she fell backwards through the door into a mound of snow. Taking a moment to gather her bearings, Rachael stood up and walked into the nearby forest. She left the coop just in time. As she reached the forest, the farmer appeared. He went into his chicken coop and soon emerged with a puzzled expression.

Rachael sat on a dry tree stump and shivered in the freezing forest. The pain was terrible. She wondered if her wound had become infected. A great deal of dirt and mud had been rubbed into it. But, Rachael could not be bothered with wounds or infection this day. Something far more important was on her mind. All that Rachael could think about was the critical documents that she carried. More than anything, she had to find her way back to the partisans. She had to get the satchel and its contents to the Allies as rapidly as possible. Lives were at stake. Quite possibly, her own husband's life was at stake. She looked up at the rising sun, turned West, and trekked through the forest at a rapid pace. She never strayed far from the tree lines. Soon, she found a stream and stopped to clean her wound. She found herself incredibly thirsty. Stopping to rest for a moment, her mind wandered to Jacob. *Is he still alive? Is my baby still alive?* These thoughts haunted her as she stood up and continued to run through the forest.

Chapter 59

The Death March

The SS had been ordered to force-march the survivors in Jacob's group almost twenty kilometers in sub-freezing temperatures, from Auschwitz to a train station near Wodzislaw. The prisoners would have virtually no rest or food. Almost none of them had a winter coat, gloves or a hat. Many lacked shoes. The prisoners without shoes wrapped their feet with cloth. However, the cloth only covered part of their feet. The exposed skin soon bled due to cuts, scrapes, stones and gravel. Broken glass, which was clear and difficult to see on the darkened road was a constant hazard. Along the way, Jacob noticed that the street began to show a reddish tint. He was confused about this, since the soil there was dark brown. He soon realized that the red was blood coming from the feet of the prisoners without shoes. Jacob's shoes were a disaster. He had to tie the layers of his shoes together to prevent them from falling apart. He now realized that he too would have had no shoes, if he had not been assigned to work in the orchestra. He did not have to make the four-kilometer trek to and from the factory, as the other prisoners had each day. Still, his heart broke for the pain of those whose feet bled along the way. *Their suffering must be terrible.*

The long line of weary prisoners stopped to rest for the night at an abandoned warehouse. It had once been a prosperous way station for grain and manufacturing interests. Now, it was a fractured shell of a building, with a leaky roof and boards torn out from the sides. It offered little protection from the freezing wind. However, the prisoners soon discovered that they were allowed to use rotten planks torn from the building to make fires. Soon, prisoners gathered around bonfires and fires made inside metal barrels. There was nothing to eat and the prisoners had to melt snow for drinking water. They gathered near the fires, rubbing their hands and arms, while they watched the Germans eat their packaged military meals. Jacob pushed snow off of the ground near a barrel with a fire in it. The air around the burning barrel was blessedly warm, compared with the hard, frozen ground. He curled himself into a ball and soon fell asleep.

Jacob dreamed of being in those strange mountains again, along with Rachael and their young son. They looked down upon that unusual valley, green with crops on one side and a brown desert on the other side. Rachael was more beautiful than ever as the mountain winds pushed her long, curly dark hair. Their son was exquisite, with curly, thick, dark hair and huge, soft brown eyes. He romped and played next to them on the mountain overlook. Soon the calm serenity was broken by the boom of cannons being fired from the top of the mountain towards the tiny village below. Tufts of brown dirt pushed high into the air revealed where the artillery shells hit the ground. Eventually, the shells began to hit buildings inside the village. People ran to and fro, like ants.

Jacob looked down at the people of the village running for their lives. He

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was drawn deeply to them. Something about those poor farmers was critically important to him, although he could not explain why. Jacob realized, with a flash of insight, that the villagers were Jews. He could not explain how he knew that to be true. But, he was convinced of it. *Am I in the holy land? Why do I feel so deeply connected to those people? It feels as though they are my family!*

As the artillery attack raged on, Jacob became incensed. The anger rose within him until it boiled over. He tossed and turned in his sleep so much that everyone around him began to stare. In his dream, Jacob looked up at the top of the mountain. There, he saw that the men who were firing artillery shells into the village wore keffiyeh, the ubiquitous Arabic head covering. *The Arabs are killing Jewish farmers! I must do something to save them! I must help my people in the valley below!* Jacob began to shout to Rachael that he needed to help the poor victims below. But she could not hear him over the cannon fire and the now-raging wind. He moved closer to her. But, with each step that he took towards them, Rachael and the child mysteriously moved farther away. The distance between them was increasing. Jacob was gripped with fear. He knew that he had to help the victims in the village. Yet, in doing so, he was moving farther away from his wife and son. Fear turned into dread as Jacob suddenly understood that his fate was tied to the villagers. His heart was pounding as he realized that he could not save the town and his family. He screamed for Rachael, but she could not hear him.

Reluctantly, Jacob walked down into the valley. Suddenly there was a blinding flash of light, followed by deafening thunder. During the crash of thunder, Jacob found himself buried underneath a mountain of rubble. He could not move. He was enveloped by a soft, silent, velvety darkness. In the distance, he heard people saying the mourner's prayer, the Kaddish. He heard his name called by someone in the distance. They repeated his name, over and over again. But, they did not call him "Jacob." They called him "Yaakov, ben Moshe."

Suddenly, someone was pushing Jacob's arm and shoulder. At first they pushed him gently. Then, they pushed harder. Finally, with great effort, Jacob opened his eyes. He looked around and saw that he was laying upon freezing ground next the burning barrel. He was back with the Auschwitz-Birkenau survivors.

Jacob could not sleep again during that terrible night in a frozen field next to an abandoned warehouse. All that he could think about was his dream. *My future is somehow tied to that small farming village in the Holy Land. I must understand the meaning of this dream. Why was I separated from Rachael and our son? Will I die there?* He pulled himself closer to the fire. He saw that several people nearby were staring at him, including Eli, who was never far away.

"You must have had quite a dream, Jacob. You were tossing about and yelling at someone." Jacob tried to force a smile. He looked at Eli, who stood over the fire, rubbing his hands together.

"Yes, Eli. I had a bad dream. But I am fine now." *I am not fine now. I must uncover the meaning of the dream. I must know my future.*

As morning arrived, Jacob stood up and walked around the warehouse. The prisoners were beginning to wake up amid shouts and orders from their

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German captors. Slowly, they began to stand and shuffle about, although a great many remained on the ground. While there was no food for the prisoners, the Germans delayed roll call until they had finished their breakfast. The officers ate hot food in a mess tent, while the enlisted men opened cans of food and warmed them over fires. Jacob salivated as the odor of cooking food was carried to him by the wind. He was incredibly hungry. His stomach gurgled and cramped as he reacted to the smell of food. He looked around and saw that the other prisoners were staring longingly at the Germans while they casually ate. The hunger gnawed at him, like a never-ending fire in his mind. He had come to understand the strangeness of starvation. The stomach pain never left him. He thought that perhaps he could eat some tree bark and was momentarily surprised when he saw several nearby prisoners pulling bark from trees and stuffing it into their mouths. He turned away in disgust as the Germans scraped their leftover food into the burning barrels.

After they had finished eating, the guards ordered the prisoners into roll call lines. The starving prisoners shuffled into ragged lines as ordered. Jacob was shocked to discover how many prisoners had died during the night. The SS officers ordered their subordinates to poke and prod prisoners who remained on the ground. There were hundreds of them. Jacob watched in amazement as not a single one was able to stand up. Those who could move, but not stand, were shot.

After roll call, the march continued. The weather had cleared somewhat, although the temperature was still below freezing. Jacob was grateful that the wind had died down. As he marched across the frigid countryside, he recalled his cold trips home from school with his friends. He thought about the day that the Hitler Youth boys beat him up. It seemed like a lifetime ago. *Was it only five years ago?* He wondered if any of his schoolmates were still alive. It seemed unlikely. He had seen no one from Salzburg for more than a year. *Am I the only survivor? And, what of the boys who beat me? Are their corpses now rotting somewhere in Russia?*

Soon, Jacob noticed prisoners dropping back from the group. They were mostly old or diseased prisoners. They walked with wide eyes and fearful expressions. Everyone understood that to stop meant death. These unfortunate prisoners pushed themselves to the limit. All around him, Jacob heard prisoners wheezing and groaning in agony, just to put one foot in front of the other. Life had been reduced to actions so pure and simple. Put one foot in front of the other foot and you will live. Stop or slow down and you will die. Jacob's left knee was astonishingly painful. Every step resulted in a jolt of severe pain, shooting up his leg and into his groin. After a few more hours, Jacob wanted to die. *I would be better off dead. I can't stand this pain. Yet, I cannot die! God has a plan for me! I cannot die! Place one foot in front of the other, Jacob. Keep doing it, over and over.* And, Jacob limped on.

Then, around mid-morning, he heard the shots begin. One by one, stragglers were shot. Again, the pure white snow turned red with Jewish blood. Jacob's left knee felt as though it was on fire. Each time that he bore his weight upon the leg, searing pain resulted. It was pure agony. By late morning, Jacob wondered

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how much longer he could limp on. The pain was hideous. He decided that if they did not reach their destination by midday, he would allow himself to fall back. *At this point, death is a dear friend. I cannot tolerate the pain any longer. I am willing to die.*

Finally, when his thoughts turned to the comfort that death would bring, he saw something looming in the distance. It was a building of some kind. Perhaps it was a tower. Minutes later, he passed a sign that showed railroad tracks and a crossing, with an arrow pointing ahead. At last, he could make out the frame structure of a railroad station. Moments later, he passed a snow-covered sign that said “Gliwice.” *They have taken us to a different location! Eli’s town undoubtedly is hosting the survivors of another group.* They had marched almost thirty-five kilometers in two days. Less than half of Jacob’s group remained alive. In his worst nightmare, Jacob could not have imagined such a bloody, deadly torturous march.

The prisoners were forced to stand in line outside of the station for more than an hour. They stomped their feet and blew their breath into their hands, to improve circulation. But, the frigid weather was terrible. The prisoners could no longer feel their extremities. Finally, a large, old train chugged into the decrepit station. By the time the prisoners were ordered into the open train, they greeted the straw-covered cattle cars warmly. They feared the freezing wind that would sweep through the open cars, but they welcomed a chance to sit down.

The train completed taking on wood and water. Then, with a loud whistle and lurch, it moved forward. For everyone, it was an opportunity to rest their damaged feet. Their shared body heat was also welcome. It was needed, as the open cars soon resembled a freezing hurricane. The effect of below-zero temperatures on exposed skin, accelerated by the wind of the traveling train, made prisoners scream in agony. Jacob buried his head in the fetid straw. Whenever he looked up, it felt as though needles were being pushed into his face. He had never imagined being this cold. Whenever he touched an exposed object, the contact caused severe, searing pain.

Jacob watched as men unwrapped the cloth from their bleeding feet. Soon, the floor of the train was covered with blood. They leaned against each other in the cattle cars as the train continually traveled West. Still without food and water, the prisoners faded in and out of consciousness. Their depravation was such that one of them died every few minutes – even though they no longer had to walk. Starvation and disease were still constant companions.

The train traveled on and on, mostly heading west. Each time the train reached a station, someone looked through the slats of the cattle car and repeated the name of the town. After almost twenty-four hours, the Czechs on board indicated that they were heading towards the border to Austria. Unbeknownst to them, a US armored division was at the same time pushing through Austria in their direction.

The train ride was another surreal experience for Jacob. He was grateful to rest his badly injured left knee. Resting was a blessing for everyone. But, the hunger was terrible. At length, they pulled into the train station at Bratslava. *I’m almost home!* Jacob could hardly believe the sign at the train station. The Ger-

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mans had transported this large group of surviving prisoners all the way through Czech territory and into Austria. *But, where are they taking us?* Germany loomed just to the north. *Are there any death camps in Austria?* Jacob still dismissed the idea that the Germans would allow witnesses to their genocide to live. *They must be splitting up all of the survivors, in case some of them are caught. It will make their reign of death seem less pervasive! I swear by my parents memory, I will survive and I will tell the world what you have done!*

The train passed slowly through neighborhoods, factories and hospitals, until it finally shuddered to a stop. There, in the station, the prisoners marched dutifully off the train and out of the station to the street. Here, they were greeted by the civilians of Bratslava with horrified stares. For more than an hour, they marched through the paved streets of the city. People stopped and stared at them, as though they had dropped in from outer space. The prisoners were greeted by startled expressions. No bread was tossed in their direction. The column marched north, towards Germany.

The march now resembled their initial march from the camp. Those prisoners too weak or injured began to fall behind. Whenever a prisoner fell behind the end of the column, they were shot. Jacob was surprised that the SS would shoot stragglers in front of the civilian population. Orders are orders, he presumed. Thus, the terrible march continued as it had before, with the weakest of the group dying. Their bodies littered the streets, where they became an instant object of derision. Children walked near the bodies, wide-eyed and fascinated. Older youth sometimes kicked or spat upon the body of a dead prisoner.

Most of the adults stared from a safe distance. Others looked away in fright, as though the mere sight of a dead Jew was distasteful. Jacob wondered how the German guards felt about marching this tattered, skeletal group of prisoners in the streets of an Austrian city. It must have lacked the valor of participating in glorious combat in defense of the Motherland.

The long, winding line of prisoners and German guards turned north and marched out of gray Bratslava. They were soon trudging through the countryside and heading towards Germany. Endless kilometers of farmland surrounded them. A winding two-lane partially paved road separated the dreary, white expanse. Snow squalls drifted here and there in the distance.

For Jacob, the experience was uncanny. The world around him slept in winter's dismal, icy grip, turning everything a pale shade of white or gray. Huge leafless trees stood as sentinels on both sides of the road. Their branches, stripped of leaves, reminded Jacob of the skeletal prisoners – mere shadows of their prior existence. No one could have guessed that they once had blossomed into healthy, happy husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and grandfathers; enjoying the love and respect of family and friends. They fell in love, and were loved in return. They were once professionals; doctors, professors, artists, business owners and government leaders. There were once respected members of their communities. They once had happy marriages, beautiful and bright children and wonderful homes. They once owned property, jewelry, beautiful clothes and went on holiday to distant lands. They once were pillars of the community, educated and peaceful. Like the dark branches above, stripped of leaves, they had become non-persons,

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stripped of everything valuable in existence. Like the dead branches above, they were pushed in one direction or the other. Everything that once had been beautiful, just and fair was now agony, fear and death. Where once life and love resided, now suffering and darkness remained.

Jacob's eyes were in constant motion, surveying the farm country for a suitable position. Something deep inside told him that his moment for action had finally arrived. His heart began to race. *Will I be successful? Or, will I lead innocent prisoners into a massacre? I cannot fail if God is with me. He has selected me for this very time and place.* While everyone else looked straight ahead, Jacob scoured the landscape for exactly the right geographic opportunity to fight the Germans.

Meanwhile, the Germans behaved as he had hoped. After the train station, the Germans split their forces in half. Jacob understood immediately. The Germans were losing the war and needed all of their troops fighting on the front lines, rather than guarding prisoners who were so weak that they could barely stand up, much less fight back. And, what would they fight with? Jacob's mind sizzled with excitement. *This will be their mistake.* The Germans now guarded a very long winding line of survivors with less than an armored company. The tanks were now gone – presumably to support the front lines. It was exactly as Jacob had hoped, dreamed and planned. *We can overcome them now!*

Jacob required a cave or scattered large rocks, for they would be the prisoner's only shelter, at first. The perfect area required defendable positions. That meant a place where they could quickly create an effective bunker. And, the perfect place also required an escape route. That meant a densely wooded area to run through, so that bullets would more likely hit a tree than their intended target. In essence, Jacob looked for a rocky open field with a nearby forest, preferably with a hardened area near the road to use as a bunker.

The long line of ragged, exhausted prisoners trudged their way through the frigid countryside. There was a great deal of artillery fire to the west. A major battle was organizing just a few kilometers away. But, the Germans now made another mistake. When they cut their forces in half, they failed to shorten the line by doubling the number of prisoners walking together. Jacob hoped that prisoners in each part of the line would be successful in gathering arms.

Suddenly, the long line came to a stop. The prisoners were told to walk to the side of the road and rest. By an incredible stroke of luck, Jacob saw a perfect location just in front of his position in line. Chrusciel and the partisans had taught Jacob the basics of guerrilla military tactics. They showed him how a small group of well-positioned men could hold out against superior forces for a very long time. Jacob thought about the story of Masada, that he had learned in Hebrew School. A small group of Jews were well-positioned in a natural bunker on top of a mountain. Because of their position, they held off the Roman Empire for a very long time. Jacob blinked his eyes and then closed them, silently praying that his perception was accurate. When he opened his eyes again, the cave and tall embankments were still there. Jacob stared into a perfect, natural bunker.

Jacob's heart was racing as he sat down in the stubble of a cornfield next to

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the road. Just ahead was a sharp curve in the road. To the left, the road continued. But, to the right, Jacob saw his opportunity. Large embankments on both sides of the road offered a perfect, natural crossfire position over the road in both directions. Four large oak trees stood on top of the embankment on the right. Two huge dead trees had fallen from the embankment and lay near the road. But, the best part was a small cave created inside the embankment when the road was built. Just outside the cave, a natural wall of rocks and earth formed a huge U-shape. Two dozen men could hide behind those rocks and hold off an entire company, if they had no tanks or artillery. And that was exactly the case.

When the road was built, they blasted a large hole through rock, rather than move the road around the huge obstruction. Jacob stared at the embankments on both sides of the road. Shivers went up and down his spine. His skin was crawling. Something deep inside was screaming at Jacob. It was a perfect, natural place to hold off attackers. In his mind he saw machine guns on top of the two embankments that would hold anyone attempting to reach them in a perfect crossfire.

He looked into the cave on his right. *It's a perfectly natural bunker!* Behind the trees lay a densely wooded forest. It was so thick with trees that Jacob could see nothing past it, even with the foliage down. *That's our escape route!* Something else tugged upon Jacob's thoughts. He found it impossible to describe. Like a splinter in his mind, this spot *felt* right for the rebellion. Somehow, he knew that this would be his place for fighting. Yet, this might also be his place to die. Jacob was swept away by burgeoning thoughts. *My entire life has been only a prelude for this moment. I was born to be here; at this place in this time, to lead my people from captivity to freedom – from death to redemption.*

Sitting on the edge of the road, Jacob looked up. The never ending gray clouds made their way across the cold expanse of sky. He inhaled deeply. The odor of damp earth filled his nostrils. Jacob's heart pounded heavily in his chest. The frigid air filled his lungs. *The time is now.* Jacob motioned to Eli, who had remained near his side constantly.

Eli gazed into Jacob's eyes as though mesmerized. Jacob understood that he would do anything asked of him. *He's a true soldier.* They had both been watching the German guards closely. The nearest guards were now huddled together under the trees ahead. They would not hear Jacob and Eli's conversation. Jacob turned so that his back was to the wind and the Germans.

"The time has come for us to fight, my brother. Are you with me, Eli?" Eli's eyes were wide open with fear and excitement.

"Yes, Jacob. Of course I am with you. I've spoken with many men who will fight at your command. I am certain that others will join in, especially now that the Germans are spread thin. Tell me what to do and when. The others are waiting for my signal."

Jacob smiled. For the first time, he was at ease. There was nothing else to worry about. "Tell them to wait until I begin my diversion. Then, here's what I want each group to do..."

As Eli walked away, Jacob thought briefly about Rachael. He hoped that she was safe with their baby. He also hoped that she would remember him.

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Then, just as Jacob was about to give the order, something wonderful happened. Loud explosions abruptly came from the West. It was artillery. But whose? No matter, thought Jacob quickly. This was a perfect distraction. *We will strike while the Germans are confused.* With a slight nod, Jacob set into motion actions that would either free the long line of savaged prisoners, or result in failure and death. Either way, Jacob's days of being held prisoner had come to an end. *I will be victorious or die.*

Eli wound his way through the long line of prisoners on the side of the road. He whispered to each small group of men. Most of the men nodded back at Eli and smiled. *The men are ready.* The guards are nervous. Instead of holding ranks along the long line, many of the guards gathered in small groups. *Another mistake by the inexperienced guards!* They looked nervously in the direction of the artillery explosions. *The Germans are upset and distracted. I could not have hoped for better conditions.*

Suddenly, conditions improved again. The line had marched all day under cloudy skies and intermittent snow flurries. But now, as if on cue, a dense snow squall arrived. Jacob watched in amazement as huge snowflakes filled the air, drastically reducing visibility. *God has sent forth from the heavens another distraction. The Germans will have trouble seeing us.* Everything had fallen into place. The rebellion that Jacob had dreamed of for so many months was at hand.

Eli returned to Jacob. He was breathing heavily, pushing great clouds of steam into the air. "It's done, Jacob. Each group knows what to do. They await your signal."

Jacob smiled and patted Eli's arm. "Thank you, Eli. You are already a hero!" Looking around one final time, Jacob saw his soldiers looking back at him. The Germans were still huddled together. Steam rose over the long line of prisoners as the heavy wet snowflakes filled the air. Looking back at Eli, Jacob suddenly felt at peace with the world. He understood that God had sent him here for a reason – and that reason was to lead men into battle against the evil captors. He looked back one final time, the corners of his mouth curving up into a soft smile. "It's time then, Eli. Let's go."

Chapter 60

The Battle

Jacob and Eli walked over to a group of five German guards, still huddled together across the road from the cave. Jacob noticed that the eyes of virtually all nearby prisoners were upon him. As he reached the guards, Eli carefully slipped around behind them. Suddenly, Jacob began wailing as loud as possible. He flung his arms about, waving randomly. To the Germans, this was only one more mad prisoner, incapable of posing any danger. To the long line of prisoners, it was a signal, calling them into action. Jacob continued to scream nonsense at the German guards, jumping up and down and waving his arms about. For a moment, his heart sank. Nothing happened. The prisoners sat and stared at him. *They are too frightened to act! All is lost!* Suddenly, from behind the Germans a huge rock flew through the air and hit one of the guards. His helmet flew away, landing in the middle of the road. The guard appeared dazed for a moment. Then, his eyes turned up into his head and he crumpled to the ground.

For a moment, Jacob thought that time had stopped. He stopped screaming. The German guards stared at their unconscious comrade lying on the ground. By the time they looked back up at Jacob, another large rock crumpled the head of a different guard. *Eli has killed two guards already!* In the time it took for the guards to realize what was happening, Jacob and Eli had grasped two rifles and were slipping off the safeties of the weapons. The remaining guards reacted slowly. Jacob and Eli pressed the triggers of the rifles at almost the same time. A loud *crack, crack* filled the air, followed by puffs of smoke from the rifles. Two of the three remaining guards fell to the ground, mortally wounded. The remaining guard was felled by another huge rock, this time from a prisoner who had been watching eagerly nearby.

The rifle shots alerted everyone and the prisoners sprang into action. Jacob had selected this spot wisely. The prisoners had ample supply of large rocks and now pelted the German guards with them. All along the line, prisoners were pounding the guards and taking their weapons. The reduced number of guards was no match for the hundreds of prisoners who had suddenly sprung into rebellious action. Soon, bullets were whizzing through the snow-filled air, along with the screams of the SS guards who had been hit.

Hundreds of emaciated prisoners turned to the nearest German and pounded him into the ground. Although it seemed like much longer to the participants, the battle took less than three minutes. They disarmed the Germans in Jacob's section of the line without taking a single casualty. He would later learn that only three prisoners had been killed, with seven more wounded. More than half of the SS company guarding the prisoners were killed. Most of the rest fled to the north and south on the road. Some ran into the forest behind the cave.

Jacob motioned to the cave and quickly set up his command bunker. Un-

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derneath the large oak trees at the curve in the road, he stationed scouts. He sent his best marksmen to man bunkers on top of the cave, facing north and south.

It happened exactly as he envisioned it would occur. "Be sure to take all ammunition from them," screamed Jacob from his new bunker headquarters. "Eli, come here!" Eli ran quickly to Jacob. "Go to the front of the line. Then come back and tell me exactly what you see.

Jacob quickly organized his bunker. After making the position as defensible as possible, he walked south, to the end of the line. What he saw there was nothing less than a miracle. He knew that a personnel carrier with supplies was following the long line of prisoners. It was poorly guarded and by the time Jacob had arrived it had been abandoned by the Germans. The bodies of two dead guards lay nearby. The remaining guards ran for their lives. Jacob wound his way through a line of smiling prisoners. He was greeted as a hero. His new troops congratulated him, slapping his back and shaking his hand. Jacob's courage had turned him into a hero and a leader of men.

Staring into the personnel carrier, Jacob was stunned. Piled inside was the most unimaginable gift. The truck was filled with machine guns, mortars, grenades, mines, rifles and box after box of ammunition. There were six large-caliber machine guns, dozens of standard machine guns, too many rifles to count and thousands of rounds of ammunition. This cache was beyond Jacob's wildest imagination. It looked like enough to serve the needs of an armored company for a major battle. He quickly ordered it sent into his bunker-HQ, inside the cave.

As Jacob walked back to the cave, at the bend in the road, he saw only a handful of shivering prisoners still sitting on the side of the road. These were the weakest and sickest of the prisoners. He believed that they too would be in the fight, if they only had the physical capability. But, too many years of captivity, disease and deprivation had left them walking skeletons, unable to care for themselves, much less fight. Everyone else, it seemed, was able to at least fire a gun. *My brave soldiers!* As Jacob reached his bunker, he heard the sound of small arms fire to the north, past the bunker. He ordered Eli to set up machine guns all around the bunker, so that they could defend against an attack from south, north and west.

Jacob continued walking towards the north end of the line. The snow was falling so heavily that he could barely see. Slowly, the sound of gunfire dissipated. By the time Jacob reached the northern end of the line, there were no more Germans in the fight.

With nothing more than ingenuity and courage, this line of bedraggled, emaciated prisoners had defeated part of an armored company of the world's best army. Fortunately, the Germans had removed their tanks. *We could not have won if their tanks remained. I thank whoever forced the Germans to send their tanks away from us.* Wherever Jacob looked, he saw proud prisoners holding onto German rifles and machine guns. As he walked among his troops, they shouted, screamed and whooped in joy. Finally, Eli and three other survivors picked up Jacob and carried him on their shoulders back to the cave. Jacob had become the hero that he was meant to be. And, while he was never more proud in his life, all that he could think about was his father and mother.

Chapter 61

Night Of The Cannons

Over the next hour, Jacob congratulated each of his fighting prisoners. He looked into their eyes, thanked them and smiled. He then motioned for everyone to come into the bunker. The sound of artillery from the West temporarily stopped. The heavy snowstorm had also tapered off into flurries. Suddenly, the frantic, loud raucous events had passed. The world was again still. Even the wind had stopped.

Jacob had the many rifles and machine guns captured placed into the hands of the strongest prisoners. Jacob called everyone together, inside the cave. Those too weak or ill to stand, sat on the ground inside the cave. Someone had already started a crackling fire near the back, where smoke from the fire was fed up and out of the cave. There was not enough room, as the remaining survivors had to line up outside. Everyone seemed to have a permanent smile. They shook hands, slapped backs, laughed and greeted each other joyously. Moments ago, they were prisoners. Suddenly, they were free. More than that, they were united passionately behind their new leader – the young Jew from Salzburg.

Jacob knew that he had to make a speech. It would be very important. Eli came to his side, smiling. They hugged each other and stood smiling before their howling prisoner army. Jacob held Eli's hand high in the air. He screamed at his troops to applaud for Eli, whose efforts made Jacob's escape idea successful. They responded with screams and joyous shouts. Eli's eyes gleamed with emotion. Two weeks ago, he was a hated man. Now, he was a hero. He glanced at Jacob with admiration and gratitude in his eyes.

The surviving prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau gathered at Jacob's side, inside the cave-bunker. Jacob stood upon a large rock, so that everyone could see him. The applause continued, unabated. Jacob tried to stop them, but the overjoyed men needed to feel good about themselves. Jacob looked out at his men. He estimated the group at over two hundred, although nearly half of that number were physically unable to fight. His heart pounded so hard that he feared it may burst through his chest. A stream of thoughts from his life coursed through Jacob's brain. Throughout his life, Jacob had felt ordinary, yet happy. His parents provided for everything, including physical and emotional nourishment. His father had been his lifelong best friend. He met and married his school sweetheart. Just five years ago, his life was wonderful. The Germans took away everything. His parents were dead. As far as he could tell, most of his friends and relatives were also dead. His wife and child might be alive, or dead. How had his life come to this point? And, if he had been destined to play this role, was he doing it properly? Having never before been a leader, Jacob harbored great concern over his next actions. He stood now as leader of a group of people that he had never known. Everyone's eyes were upon him. *God gave me this chance*

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to be a leader. These people followed me and defeated our enemy. Our cause is just and righteous. I will fight and die rather become a prisoner again. My entire life was nothing but a precursor to this moment. I pray for the strength to continue.

Many of this group of ragtag, starving rebellious survivors would later say that they had never heard a speech like it. Among Jacob's group, which included his barracks and eight others, two hundred and twenty eight prisoners remained from an original group of almost six hundred. The rest lay in blood-stained gutters along many kilometers of roads back to the camp called Auschwitz-Birkenau. For one glorious moment everyone's eyes were upon Jacob, as he stood upon the rock in his makeshift bunker.

As Jacob looked out at his army, he felt humbled in a way never before experienced. Suddenly, because of his actions, he had become "responsible" for these poor people. And, poor they were – in every way. They had no military training, no physical attributes, no strength, no combat experience or knowledge of combat tactics, no artillery, no air support and only a handful of machine guns, mines and grenades. Looking across Jacob's new regiment, he saw at best one hundred men strong enough to fight. They had gone without food for almost three days. They had to melt snow for water. How much longer could they remain strong enough to fight?

So it comes to this. The Germans will soon learn of this tiny rebellion and send airplanes and tanks to squash it. It will be a massacre and it will be my fault. Still, if one must die, his death should have meaning. Ultimately, we cannot win. Our ammunition will run out. I must help my fighters to die as brave fighting men. He waved his arms out to his sides. The prisoners finally hushed their wild screaming. The cave became silent as all eyes were upon Jacob. His heart was pounding. He thought about his deep love for Rachael. He thought about his parents and how proud they would have been of his actions. *God, grant me the wisdom to help these men die with honor.*

"My fighting survivors, I salute you!" The victorious prisoners raised their rifles and shouted. Again, Jacob had to endure wild applause for several long moments. They finally became quiet again. Through watery eyes, Jacob shouted, "I am Yaakov ben Moshe. Some of you know me as Jacob Silverman, from Austria." Jacob's use of his Hebrew name was spontaneous. Yet, if felt appropriate. Most of the prisoners who survived were Jewish. He continued, "For more than four years now, the Germans have been punishing us. They have been exterminating the Jewish population of Europe. For more than four years, we have been starved, beaten, tortured, forced into slave labor and made sick by inhuman living conditions. Some of us have endured brutal medical experiments. The Nazis have forced many of us to do terrible things." Jacob paused for a moment, recalling how he had finally become Sonderkommando. His terrible nightmare had become reality. It was not a dream, but an accurate premonition. All of his mental efforts were required to continue. He pushed away thoughts of his parents and of Rachael while he looked out across the crowd of men in front of him. They too had lost so much. When he continued, there was a newfound strength in his voice. In the stillness, all eyes were upon Jacob.

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“My brave fighters, the Germans removed every personal freedom that we had. They reduced us to animals, begging for food. We lived in shame. But, underneath our misery, we were still Jews. We respected the Sabbath and prayed on our high holy days. We never forgot who we are. Gentlemen, we are still human beings. And, although we have lived in shame and misery under the boots of Nazi Germany, we now have an opportunity to fight and die like men – like heroes.”

Jacob paused again, feeling the weight of his responsibility. “Proud survivors from Auschwitz-Birkenau, I will not promise you victory. And, even if we could win, almost all of our friends and relatives are dead. What kind of life would await us? What terrible nightmares would haunt us forever? But now, we can die like men – fighting those who imprisoned us and killed our relatives. Here, in this strange place, we can fight back. And, when the ammunition runs out, we can die like men. We might not be able to defeat the Germans, but, I can promise you an honorable death – the death of a free man, fighting for his people’s freedom. My brothers, some of you are too sick or too weak to fight. Have no fear. We will defend you. As we mourn our dead families, let us also fight for their memories. From now on, we are the First Brigade of the Fighters of Israel!” Thunderous applause and shouts of joy filled the still winter air. Even the small gentile group cheered. “Gentlemen, the weight of your actions now will echo across all eternity! And, even if your body fails, your soul will be embraced forever as a martyr. We fight for the redemption of our people and for everlasting freedom. Now, who will fight with me?”

A thundering sound arose from the disheveled, starving men, echoing through the cave and reverberating in Jacob’s ears. It was a glorious sound. *Here, just a few hundred miles from my home city of Salzburg, I will spend the final minutes of my life. But, I cannot imagine any group of men that I would rather die with. This is the finest moment of my life.* As the cheers began to die down, Jacob moved out of the crowded cave. He shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with his men. As he looked into their eyes, he saw energy, respect and determination. He felt fortunate to have their confidence.

Jacob used the remaining hours before darkness moving guns and ammunition, creating bunkers and moving armed men into positions based upon their strengths and skills. At nightfall, the sound of artillery from the west began again. But, this time it was much closer than during the day. A great battle must certainly have been unfolding. Yet, Jacob thought something was strange about the sound of the artillery. For one thing, the explosions were too close together. And, some of the explosions were so close to them that he could feel the impact of them through the ground. Jacob quickly realized that he was hearing the sound of artillery from both sides. He was grateful not to be underneath those frightening shells, whistling through the air. Jacob could estimate their distance from the artillery explosions mathematically – the same way one would estimate the distance from a thunderstorm. He calculated that the battle was no more than four kilometers to the west – just past the large dense forest. Instead of raining shells upon the enemy over a brief period of time, there was no respite. Incredibly, the sound of artillery shells exploding in the west labored throughout the night. Jacob

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could not imagine the horror of being exposed to such a devastating bombardment.

Under cover of darkness, Jacob moved his men and equipment into final positions. Those too sick or weak to fight remained in the protection of the cave. Jacob was very grateful that he had lived among the partisans. Anton Chrusciel was a tremendous teacher. Although Jacob was not well trained, Anton taught him how to implement basic military tactics. His first task was to build a strong bunker on top of the cave on both sides of the road. As long as the machine gun ammunition lasted, these two hills offered a perfect crossfire that the Germans would be unable to penetrate. The top of the embankment facing south, over the cave, already contained fallen trees and rocks. Little work was required to make a strong, safe bunker there for a machine gun crew. Unfortunately, nothing but grass was on the embankment facing north. Jacob assigned the strongest of his men to build a bunker there. It took this crew the entire night to move heavy rocks and fallen trees up the embankment. They then had to arrange the rocks and trees together, filling holes with clay to protect the bunker crew.

Meanwhile, Jacob formed two platoons to cover the road in both directions. These men were assigned to reconnoiter, rather than fight. They were selected because of their agility, stealth, speed, as well as their ability to understand German. Jacob understood that military intelligence was at least as important to a general as his soldier's fighting skills. Jacob had to know what the Germans were up to. He believed that they would approach the escaped prisoners from both sides. Unfortunately, the Germans had not left them any radios. Communication would be maddeningly slow. Jacob asked them to extend their lines to at least one kilometer in both directions. One member of these platoons was told to stop and remain in position at intervals along the line. Thus, messages could be passed along the line in both directions silently. Runners were selected to carry information back and forth. Finally, Jacob selected the best marksmen to man the rocky natural bunkers that extended out from the cave, turning the huge U-shaped firmament into an enormous, well manned bunker. Tremendous firepower would rain bullets on any force attempting to take the cave from this long bunker. Behind the same large rocky formation, Jacob assigned men to operate the five mortars. Unfortunately, only one man had prior experience using a mortar. Jacob quickly had him teach a group of men how to use the equipment. Shells were distributed, along with the regular ammunition.

Another, small group of men were rapidly trained in how to plant land mines. Jacob had these men bury mines along both sides of the road and in both directions. He smiled as he thought about what would happen. The young and inexperienced enemy would come at them from the road. He was certain of it. When they came under fire from Jacob's bunker, they would move off to the side of the road for protection. They would walk directly onto the mines! It was a simple, if not elegant trap.

Finally, Jacob ordered the distribution of arms and ammunition. He placed two of the heavy caliber machine guns on top of the tall embankments. From those positions, now protected by the recently-completed bunkers, Jacob's force had complete control over both sides of the road. He then placed the other four

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heavy machine guns in front of the cave. The cave would be very well defended, except for the forest to the east, behind the embankment. Jacob did not anticipate that the Germans would attack from the east. It would be too difficult to send an armored column through such densely wooded ground. It was much more likely that the Germans would attack from the road. However, to be safe, Jacob created a third platoon and sent them a kilometer into the deep, dark forest.

At four in the morning, Jacob leaned against a huge rock in the back of the cave. Unbelievably, the barrage of artillery fire had not slackened. If anything, it sounded closer. Freezing and exhausted, Jacob huddled with the ill prisoners in the back of the cave. Their faces flickered in the light of the small fire. Their eyes held only despair. These poor men were a step away from death. They suffered from all manner of disease, including typhus, tuberculosis and malaria. Those who were not sick were devastated by starvation and weakness. They had been beaten into submission by guards, like everyone else. Many of these men had long ago stopped fighting for food. Some of them were too sick. Others had given up all hope and were ready to die, after losing all of their loved-ones. These men barely continued to breathe. Pale skin folded over their bones. Dark hollow circles surrounded their pathetic eyes. Here they lay, gasping for air. Their dark, blank eyes stared at Jacob. He knew that many of them would not live past the night, even if they held off the Germans. In this damp, musty cave, in a strange land, the last survivors of their families waited to die in this new nightmare world.

Finally, exhaustion took over and Jacob drifted into a troubled sleep. In his dream, he remembered the hundreds of days and nights when he played his violin for the families entering Auschwitz. It was agonizing to see the faces of the innocent pass before him again. There were so many thousands and thousands of faces. Jacob played Mozart and Beethoven for the doomed of his race. He again saw the smiling faces of children as they waited restlessly in line outside the gas chambers. They walked, hand in hand with their parents and grandparents. They wore heavy coats and multiple layers of clothing – even in the summer. They carried everything of value, a lifetime of photos, heirlooms and precious gifts. So many thousands of people passed in front of Jacob. How bravely they waited and how patiently they walked in line. They quietly passed by Jacob on their way to meet God. He so much wanted to scream at them. *How many of us have been killed? How successful have the Germans been? Besides us, are there any Jews left in Europe?* Tears ran down Jacob's face as he dreamt. He moaned and wiped them away in his sleep. Suddenly, with a start, Jacob woke up. It took a moment to reorient when he discovered that he was inside a cave. Then, his eyes rested upon a young man directly across from him. The poor man was gasping for breath. A rattling sound emerged each time he exhaled. The young man's blank eyes stared up. There was no recognition in those hollow eyes. The flower of European Jewry was dying in front of him and he had been powerless to stop it – until now. Finally, Jacob cried himself to sleep.

Two hours later, Jacob awoke to discover that the young man across from him had stopped breathing. He continued to stare up at the ceiling, the same blank stare as before. His body looked the same. Jacob's mind buzzed back to

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life. *His body is the same. Where is his soul? No matter, I will discover for myself soon.* Two men silently grasped the dead youth and took his body out of the cave, where the old Rabbi observed the death rituals. *Another innocent man killed because he was a Jew. He could have gone on to find a cure for cancer. His children could have been brilliant leaders. Now, his children have no future. Did his family name end with his death? Will mine?* And through it all on this dark, terrifying night, the artillery bombardment continued unabated.

Someone woke Jacob by pulling on his left arm. He woke with a start, staring up into the eyes of a man he had assigned to the platoon heading north, up the road. "What is it?"

Jacob rubbed his eyes as the breathless man sat next to him. "I'm Max. I've been up the road to the north about three kilometers. We found a German position camped there. It looked like company strength, but I saw no tanks. I managed to get close enough to hear them talking." Jacob looked into the man's dark eyes. Max was frightened. But, he had something important to say.

"So, tell me."

Max looked down for a moment. When he looked up, his dark eyes burned into Jacob's. "I heard a German lieutenant say that we were supposed to be sent to another German death camp. It was in Austria called Ebensee. The German said that when we get there, we will dig huge trenches in the ground. The Germans will then shoot us and bury us in the trenches we dug." Max looked down again.

Jacob hesitated for a moment. "Thank you Max. You have done us all a great service. Did you hear any more?"

After a moment, Max smiled. His eyes looked up with excitement. "They plan to attack from the road at dawn."

Jacob walked out to the front of the cave. Away from the fire, it was freezing. His breath swirled around his face as he looked for signs of German activity. The almost constant barrage of artillery continued. This time he knew that it was closer. A puddle of water near the cave entrance rippled after each explosion, from the ground shock. *Be you American or British, I feel you closer. Can we survive until you reach us?* Faint light began to emerge from the east. It was almost dawn. Suddenly, the nearly constant artillery stopped. The newfound silence created a strange aura. *It is the pause before the battle.*

A breathless runner suddenly appeared from the platoon that went south. "Sir, we have our platoon strung out more than a kilometer along the road, in the woods. So far, we've heard nothing." Jacob sent the runner back with orders to extend another kilometer and remain out of sight. The runner begged permission to build a fire. Jacob refused it. He understood how cold his soldiers were and he felt their pain. But, a fire would give away their position. Moments later, runners from the north and east came back. All was quiet.

In the first light of dawn, Jacob inspected the two tall bunkers, overlooking the road on both sides. He was surprised with how solid they were. Huge fallen trees had been moved into position surrounding the machine guns. Logs were placed on top of logs, creating a tiny fortress for the four person crew. The men had then packed rocks, stones, hard clay and dirt into every crack and crevice,

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protecting the machine gun crews inside from bullets. He marveled at how well the bunkers had been constructed. Then, he recalled that Sam Farber, an engineer from Dresden, had led the bunker construction crew. *He must have been a wonderful engineer.* When Jacob returned to the cave, he found the men devouring mushrooms. The platoon sent to the east had discovered them in the forest. There was also a small pile of frozen ears of corn, left in the nearby fields from the fall harvest. Some roots and herbs growing wild in the forest were also near the fire. To Jacob's great surprise, someone was making coffee over the fire. They found it in the ammunition truck, along with cooking and canteen gear. Someone else was attempting to make a stew from the aforementioned ingredients. Jacob paused for a moment, trying to remember the last time he had anything to eat. Like everyone else, Jacob had grown used to the constant pain of starvation. The thought of consuming old, discarded ears of corn with wild mushrooms suddenly felt like a feast.

For the next two hours, Jacob had nothing to do but wait. Shortly after dawn, a runner came from the north. The Germans were advancing. He said that it looked like at least a company in strength. Jacob pounced on the young man. "Did you see or hear any tanks?"

The runner said that they could not tell if there were any tanks. "But," he said. "None of us heard any motors at all."

Less than twenty minutes later, a runner from the platoon to the south returned with the same report. The Germans were advancing along the road. Strength was likely a company, with no armor or air support. As Jacob anticipated, the Germans were taking the easy way. *They didn't even bother with an artillery bombardment. They must have assumed that we would all be so weak and frightened that we would gladly surrender.* They traveled the easy way – on the road and, apparently, without armor. Jacob smiled as he imagined the German commander considering a request for tank or artillery support. "What, you need tanks and artillery to kill a few starving, sick Jews? What kind of soldier are you!" *Well, they would soon discover that they would, indeed, require tanks or artillery to defeat us. Yes, yes. At some point we'll run out of ammunition. But, the Fighters of the First Brigade of Israel will not surrender!*

Jacob limped to each of his positions and told his troops that in no uncertain terms they must save their ammunition. "Machine guns are to have the automatic setting OFF," he instructed. "Select your shots carefully. One Nazi – one shot. Take your time and aim carefully. Do NOT fire when you are running. Stay hidden at all costs. And, above all, do not fire until you have my order."

The light of dawn was faint, as one might expect for January in the Alps. Deep, dark shadows were cast from the forest across the road. Jacob smiled again. *Perfect conditions. A man can hide in such a shadow!* He completed one final inspection of the bunkers on top of the two hills guarding the cave. His left leg was incredibly painful. He carried as much machine gun ammunition as possible to them, which made his knee pain worse yet. Jacob smiled and chatted with the men in the two bunkers. Underneath, he was near tears. His hand trembled as he shook the hands of his men. "I'm so proud of you," Jacob repeated to his army of walking skeletons. "You are most brave," he repeated

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while looking in their eyes. All of them understood that the bunkers would not withstand an attack by air, by artillery, tanks, bazooka, mortar or rockets. The bunkers were sound and would repel bullets. But, the bunkers would fall to armored opposition. No one spoke of it. As Jacob began to leave, an arm stopped him. It was an older man from Warsaw, named Isaac Stein. He identified himself as a Rabbi. Jacob looked at him with wide eyes. "Rabbi, where did you learn to use a machine gun like this?" The old Rabbi smiled. "I was in the Polish Army a long time ago." He asked if they could briefly pray together.

In dawn's frozen, silent birth, each man held the hand of the man next to him. They recited several prayers. At the end, one of the men said, "Good Shabbos." While it had slipped Jacob's mind, he suddenly realized that it was Saturday. The men stared at each other for a moment in silence. Finally, Jacob broke the silence. "Well, since I doubt that the Germans will stop fighting because it's Shabbos, we should probably prepare for the worst." The men laughed for a long time. Jacob looked down for a moment. The world fell silent, except for a large hawk that circled high above. It offered an occasional shriek, while making slow, lazy circles in the updrafts. Everyone looked up at the majestic soaring bird. Jacob smiled and said, "I'll take that as a good sign." They laughed again. Then, Jacob's smile disappeared. He looked into the eyes of his men with fierce determination, and said, "My friends, you are already heroes. Whatever happens here, your bravery will echo through eternity." Jacob smiled briefly as he left. Inside, he was still shaking.

As expected, the German attack began from the north. The Germans marched the better part of an armored company directly down the center of the road. But there were still no tanks. The attack began with a barrage of mortar fire, aimed at the cave. Jacob pulled everyone into the cave. When the mortar bombardment was over, Jacob ordered his men quickly back to their positions. All others able to fight were positioned with rifles outside the cave behind its solid outer walls. There was not a single casualty from the German mortar attack.

The Germans then sent four patrols directly down the road to the cave. Two patrols attacked from the north and another two patrols attacked from the south. They made no attempt to hide from Jacob's small army. They simply marched in the center of the road until they had almost reached the cave.

Without knowing it, the Germans marched past Jacob's soldiers, still hidden in the woods alongside the road. When they reached fifty meters from the cave, Jacob ordered both bunkers to fire. Then the machine guns and rifles in front of the cave also fired. It was a bloodbath. The Germans were not expecting gunfire from anywhere except the cave. The Nazis made a catastrophic mistake with devastating consequences. Caught in the middle of a hellacious crossfire, the German soldiers had no idea where to run. With no place to hide, they began to retreat back along the road. It was then that Jacob ordered his patrols in the forest to fire. The Germans were completely surrounded. They reacted with shock when bullets began to fly at them from the side of the road. It was a massacre, both north and south of the cave. Jacob estimated that more than a hundred German soldiers lay dead or wounded on or near the road. Miracu-

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lously, none of the mines had been set off. The Germans were largely killed where they stood, on the road.

In less than ten minutes, a German company had been decimated by an untrained, sick, starving group of prisoners. They were unable to retreat. The wounded Germans could not have helped but hear the thunderous sound as Jacob's troops screamed and hollered in victory. It felt wonderful. For Jacob, it was the sweet sound of justice. This small band of emaciated prisoners, most of whom had never fired a gun, had just defeated eight platoons of one of the world's best trained and equipped armed forces.

When the battle was over, Jacob trudged up the hill and congratulated his brave soldiers. There were smiles, shouts of joy and back-slapping everywhere. Men were shaking hands with each other. Some were praying, thanking God for this deliverance from death. Jacob was also pleased to see that his men had used their precious ammunition sparingly. "We will die when our ammunition runs out," was Jacob's mantra to his troops. They understood it and were very careful about firing their weapons.

As Jacob walked down the embankment from one of the bunkers, he looked at the front of the cave. What he saw stopped him in mid-stride. Someone had found a huge rectangular piece of white cloth and some blue paint. They painted two large horizontal lines across the cloth, near the top and the bottom. In the center of the cloth, they drew the Star of David. It was the ancient flag of the Jewish people. The same flag flew over synagogues in Jerusalem and throughout the free world, wherever Jews resided. This "flag of the Israelites" as one of his men called it, was now strung over the center of the cave. It could be seen for almost a kilometer in any direction. Jacob stopped dead in his tracks as tears welled in his eyes. It was a moment in time that he would never forget.

As Jacob stood below the flag, his men ran to him with shouts of joy. When they reached him, they picked him up and carried him over their heads. They carried Jacob in circles underneath the flag, singing patriotic Hebrew songs. Finally, they put Jacob back on the ground. In the silence that followed, a man began to sing the Israeli song, Hatikvah. Although it would be a few more years before the song would become the Israeli national anthem, nearly everyone understood what it meant. As far as they knew, they were the only Hebrew army on earth. Until the Germans returned in numbers sufficient to kill Jacob and his army, they would remain the free fighters of God's chosen people.

About two hours after the bloodbath, a runner arrived with bad news from the south. Yet another German line was marching along the road from the south. The runner indicated that still, no tanks were spotted. Moments later, a runner from the north arrived – breathless – with the same news. This time, instead of mortar fire, the Germans used artillery to try to blast the prisoners into surrender. For almost an hour, the cave and bunkers were blasted by German "eighty-eights." Again, Jacob recalled everyone, except the soldiers in the forest, back into the protection of the cave. The artillery bombardment created more damage than the earlier mortar fire. However, there were still no casualties. A few men near the front of the cave had some shrapnel wounds. But, they were soon back in the fight.

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The Germans sent patrols toward the cave from the north and the south, again on the road. This time, however, they were armed with bazookas. Jacob had runners going constantly from his bunkers and his troops in the forest, to keep lines of communication open. He instructed everyone to fire on the bazookas first.

As he feared, the bazookas did plenty of damage. The bunker on top of the embankment opposite the cave was hit first. Logs were instantly splintered into worthless pieces of broken wood. Jacob was alarmed as he could clearly see into the bunker. And if he could see into it, the Germans could fire into it. At the same time, the Germans poured gunfire into the cave, preventing anyone from coming out to rescue fighters from the damaged bunker. Suddenly, a bazooka shot hit the top of the cave. It hit with a thunderous bang, followed by echoes so loud that Jacob thought his eardrums had burst. The explosion was so overwhelming, that Jacob assumed it must have exploded inside the cave.

Fighting a terrible ringing in his ears, Jacob wobbled out of the cave. Bullets were suddenly whizzing all around him. But, he had to look up on the embankment over the cave. The bazooka hit was on the outer lip of the cave entrance. Indeed, part of it exploded in the front of the cave. He scurried around the cave and limped up the hill. When he reached the top, he was deeply concerned. The bunker that his men had made from logs, stone and boulders, was destroyed. It must have been a direct hit. In the center, Jacob saw the men who had been manning the bunker. They were all dead. Their bodies smoldered. Jacob ordered men to remove the one working machine gun and ammunition. On the way down, he prayed that it still worked.

The happiness that followed their initial victory over the Germans was now gone. Jacob's stomach twisted in anxiety. He had expected his bunkers to last much longer. Now, there was only one bunker, and it was the one least protected from German attack. He heard its machine gun firing rapidly as he reentered the cave.

Suddenly, explosions were heard from the road. Jacob ran to the south and saw that German soldiers had wandered off the road. They were detonating the land mines one after another. The Germans had not anticipated that the sickly Jews could put up another fight. When it happened, the Germans searched for an escape route. Bang and after bang told Jacob that the same thing was happening to the north. He retreated to his bunker for information.

It was clear that the German's second attack upon the Auschwitz survivors would not meet with the same dismal fate as their first attack. Yet, dozens of newly arrived German soldiers lay dead, this time upon the side of the road. The Nazis had again underestimated Jacob's troops. Repelled by the same crossfire, the Germans were forced to hide behind trees and rocks. But, this time the land mines killed them. *I'd give a million to hear what the German commanders are saying right now! Imagine, two German companies repelled by a ragtag bunch of misfit Jews with no military training They must have assumed we weren't smart enough to use land mines.*

Jacob suddenly realized that the Germans were thinking in two-dimensional terms. They assumed that they were safe, as long as they were hidden

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from the front of the cave. Jacob called a runner in. "What is your name kid?"

The young man looked like he was barely fourteen. "I am David Klein." Jacob's stomach twisted again as he realized how important communication would be.

"All right David. I need you to go out and find the patrol on the north side of the road. When you get there, tell them to attack with everything they have got. Tell them to pour it on. When they force the Germans out from their hiding places, we will shoot them from here and from our bunker." As the young man turned to run, Jacob pulled him back. "David, don't stop anywhere to fight. Right now, your words are more important than your bullets. Do you understand?" David smiled at him and ran to the north.

At the same time, Jacob asked for a runner to take a message to the patrol on the south. He told that runner to encircle the Germans attacking from the south, forcing them towards the cave, where Jacob's men would mow them down. Finally, he sent eight men with automatic weapons and grenades up to the one remaining bunker. "We cannot lose the bunker," he informed them. "The next hour will determine whether we will live another day." But, it would be much longer than an hour before this second battle would be over.

Chapter 62

The Sniper

Just over six hundred meters beyond the cave entrance, nineteen-year-old Karl Schmidt lay horizontal upon a large tree branch. He was well over twenty meters above the ground. However, Karl had been trained to climb trees and buildings and to stay there for days, if necessary. He was well-acclimated to the height. Besides, he thought, he was now exactly even with the entrance of the cave. Karl was an intense young man. Trained to be in the elite Sniper Division of the Wehrmacht, Karl had never been assigned to a position this important. For two years, he had been the grunt of his unit. Despite the fact that he had the most accurate marksmanship scores, Karl performed every unimportant and mundane function that existed for his fellow soldiers. And, despite his exceptional marksmanship, he had not received one important assignment – until now. He understood that Germany was losing the war. But, his anger at the slowness in which his company commander chose to use his outstanding marksmanship skills had now boiled over.

Karl flew past all of his competition when he joined his unit. He was the best marksman by far. He bragged to everyone that he was the best. His mind constantly ruminated over his nascent responsibilities. He was furious that the war might end before his exceptional skills had been utilized. *Why did it take two years to get my shot at the enemy? How could they do that to me? I'm damn well going to give them a kill today! I'm going to show them that Karl Schmidt is the best marksman in the German Army! Today, I will bag my first enemy leader!*

Finally, Karl was in position to hurt the enemy. Finally, it was his turn. Unseen by everyone, the lone sniper made a home for himself in the huge tree. With plenty of food and water, he was prepared to stay in the tree as long as necessary to achieve his kill. He was experienced enough to be patient, having been trained by his company's most accurate marksman. With his trainer now dead, Karl was number one. Or, so he thought.

While everyone's eyes were upon the battle on the road, Karl had deftly climbed from one strong limb to the next. He soon lay horizontal on a large limb overlooking the cave. The distance was only a few hundred meters. He would be able to kill any target in front of the cave, or inside the cave near the entrance. Of course, being that close meant that his position would probably be revealed shortly after firing. Thus, his first shot had to be perfect. He gazed through the highly accurate Leupold scope, at the same time estimating wind direction and speed. When he was comfortable with his position, he loaded the sharpshooter's rifle with ammunition and waited for the right moment.

For the next three and a half hours, Jacob's troops battled ferociously with the much better trained and equipped Germans. The Germans had not counted

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on the Auschwitz prisoners to be anywhere but hiding in the cave, or up in the one remaining bunker. When Jacob assigned more troops to protect the bunker, the Germans directed their soldiers to attack there. This left them wide open from behind – from the forest, where they least expected it. By the time they heard the bullets whizzing at them from the forest, it was too late. Their eyes were wide with surprise and fear as they turned and saw the ragtag Jewish prisoners running at them, guns ablaze and rifles fit with bayonets. Jacob lost two of his brave troops, with another three wounded. However, at least ninety German soldiers were killed between the crossfire and the mines. Jacob could not have hoped for a better result.

The battle to the south was even more impressive. As Jacob had planned, his troops encircled the Germans. The Hebrew fighters crept and crawled from tree to tree, as the Germans concentrated on the bunker to their front. The forest floor was cold and damp, muffling the footfalls of Jacob's soldiers. Then, suddenly, they burst through into the German position from behind. The faces of the German soldiers reflected complete surprise. How could these sickly, weak Jewish prisoners have reached such a position? Suddenly, the Germans were being pounded from all sides. The massacre was over in less than four minutes. Jacob was told that there were thirty three more dead or dying Germans on the ground in the forest. Those few who had survived were seen running at breakneck speed back to the German positions. Once more, the sickly, untrained concentration camp survivors had outgunned and outmaneuvered the mighty German army.

In the silence that followed the battle, Jacob walked out of the cave. Cordite filled the silent air. The days being so short at this time of year, it was now almost dark. "We've won one more battle," Jacob told the small group of men around him. As night fell, Jacob asked anyone who had prior army experience to come to the campfire in the cave. For hours, he and the other men discussed their military strategy. Everyone agreed that they could not hold out much longer. When the ammunition was gone, so were they. They now had less than half of the ammunition that they had two days ago, when the battle began. Most of the grenades were gone. They had captured two bazookas, but had only a dozen shells. Their only mortar was almost broken and out of service. Someone continued to fire it when the barrel had become too hot. The explosion killed two of Jacob's fighters. There were three mortar shells remaining. Jacob ordered his men to plant the shells next to the road, where they could be detonated by rifle during the next German advance.

Jacob and his men discussed military strategy for hours. Finally, when everyone was too tired to think, Jacob asked, "Why do you suppose that the Germans have not attacked us from behind – from the forest?" Not a minute later, explosions and small arms fire could be heard from the forest behind the cave.

Someone said, "You are not only a military leader, Jacob – you are also a prophet." Everyone laughed. But, it was a nervous laugh. It had been the unspoken fear of everyone that the cave would be attacked from the east, from behind. Jacob understood that they could defend themselves from all directions – except from the east.

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An old man spoke. "It seems that the Germans have finally found out how to attack us from behind, eh?" Everyone looked at him, but said nothing. After a moment of silence, Jacob spoke. "So, my friends, if the Germans are coming to kill us from the forest, who are they fighting now, on the way?" Everyone stared at Jacob in silence. *Who indeed?*

Chapter 63

The Battle's Conclusion

The next day, January 23rd, began with an enormous barrage of artillery fire from the west. This time, the cave trembled with each explosion. The Germans were in a hell of a fight less than a kilometer from Jacob's bunker. It seemed ludicrous that the Germans would devote any troops to the battle against the small group of surviving prisoners, when they obviously had to fight the better trained and equipped Allies nearby. Yet, time and again the Germans sent soldiers down the same road to attack the cave.

Jacob and his band of Hebrew fighters repelled three more attacks on January 23rd. The Germans came again from the north and the south, along the road. Each time, they were pushed back. Jacob was mystified. *Why don't they use tanks? Two or three tanks would wipe us out in minutes. The same goes for artillery or an attack from the air! Why don't they bombard us?* Yet, the Germans used only regular army troops each time, unsupported by armor or air force. Again, the German troops were atypical. Again, most of the bodies that lay across the battlefield were old men or young boys. This was not the fearsome German militia or the famed vicious SS. They were the dregs of the German army. They fought with honor, but not courage or skill.

All day, Jacob heard sporadic small arms fire coming from the eastern forest. This troubled him greatly. *Our escape route is gone. We now have no place to run. This cave will be our cemetery.* Finally, the worst happened. By late afternoon, Jacob's troops began to run out of ammunition. The heavy machine guns were all but spent. They had no mortar shells, mines or bazooka ammunition. Most of the men still had rifles, but few of them had more than one clip remaining. As darkness fell, with nothing but knives to defend themselves, the Auschwitz survivors prepared for hand-to-hand combat. Again, Jacob heard the sound of artillery explosions coming from the west. *Who is firing those cannons? Are they American or British cannons? The sound is so close to us now.* Jacob looked into the fire that warmed the center of the cave. He grimaced in pain. *If the Nazis don't kill me, my knee will.*

A round of artillery landed just west of the cave. It was just a random shell that, for whatever reason, overflew its target by a huge distance. Instead of landing upon the remnants of the German troops who were hiding in the forest, it flew well over the forest and landed near the entrance of the cave. When the shell landed, there was a blinding white light. The entire cave was suddenly lit up revealing each and every rock, crack and crevice. The light was impossibly white in the surreal darkness. It was as though the sun had suddenly exploded inside their cave. Suddenly, the incredible light was replaced by a deep, intense thud. Within a millisecond, the ground shook and everyone inside the cave felt a wave of warm air pass over them. In an instant, there was a tremendous "bang."

The Battle's Conclusion

All of the survivors in the cave covered their ears in intense pain. The echo was deafening. And then, just as quickly as it happened, it was gone. Jacob and the others were left to look at each other in amazement. Some of the men who were near the cave's entrance had blood running from their ears. Their eyes were wide open with the sudden shock that they could no longer hear. Some of them were crying. Their tears made vertical stripes down their filthy cheeks, washing clean lines into the grime and soot. A few of them stood up and ran around the cave in panic.

Jacob found a pen and some paper from the German truck and began to write furiously upon it in Yiddish. Then, he ran from man to man among those who had lost their hearing. He forced them to read the paper. It said, "Don't panic, your hearing will return. Be patient." This dissipated much of the panic among the men who were closest to the explosion. One of them looked at it and laughed. He pointed to Jacob's last sentence. "Be patient," it said. Jacob suddenly felt foolish. *Why be patient when the Germans are going to storm into this cave and kill us all in a matter of minutes or hours? Be patient to die? That's a laugh.* Jacob's face turned red as he forced a smile for the man who laughed. *We both know that we'll be dead very soon.*

Jacob and his ragtag army were now completely surrounded. Standing next to the campfire inside the cave, Jacob drew his men close and asked if they wished to surrender. The fire crackled in the ensuing silence. He had to write the question down for the men who had lost their hearing. Jacob looked at his men in the flickering light. *We are lost. I have failed. I have led these innocent men to their deaths. What good is freedom when we can only enjoy it for two or three days? We've eaten nothing but a few rotting mushrooms. None of us will live much longer, whether we are killed by the Nazis or by starvation.*

Not a single man wanted to give up. Jacob stood in the center of the cave, waiting. He had asked which fighters preferred to surrender. He said that he would assist them in any way possible, to make sure that they would not be shot. Jacob gazed over the fire at the flickering faces of his soldiers. Everyone's eyes were upon his eyes. They were totally defiant. Some smiled. Others nodded their head. Each and every survivor, even the badly injured, stood with Jacob on the side of fighting for their freedom. Not a single fighter wanted to surrender – not even the sick ones. Jacob was astounded and incredibly proud. *They would rather die as free men than as prisoners – even if it means a bullet through the brain.* Thanks to Jacob, the survivors had become men again. *And, having tasted the sweet nectar of freedom, they would never again be stripped of it. Not by anyone.*

Jacob could not have been more proud. Resting his aching left knee on the side of large rock, he smiled as he gazed into the faces of the men he had just led into battle. "Gentlemen, no matter how we die, we will be fighting for our freedom. Let us show the Nazis that we will never again be their puppets. Let us show the Nazis that Jews can fight. We have already taught them a lesson. The next time that they pick on Jews, they will have something new to think about!" Suddenly recalling his own work shoving bodies into the crematoria, Jacob paused, trembling. His stomach was in his throat. "Let us show them that Jews would

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rather die than live under Nazi rule. We would rather die as free men. Gentlemen, your actions today will be remembered in the history of our people.”

As Jacob turned to walk to the back of the cave, he was overwhelmed by a sound from inside the cave. The echo was so intense that he required a moment to identify the sound. It was applause. He had assumed that his men were beaten, defeated physically and emotionally. Everyone understood that they would be dead within minutes. Without ammunition, the battle was over. Turning back to look at his men, he was surprised to see that they were all on their feet, clapping their hands. Moments later, he was mobbed by his men. Some of the strongest men pushed Jacob onto their shoulders. They ran around the cave carrying Jacob, singing as though they were at a wedding or bar mitzvah. Jacob was amazed. Men who were about to die were laughing and dancing to an unheard tune. He looked down in amazement. *How can they be happy? They are about to die!* Then, just as suddenly, the answer appeared. *They sing and dance in celebration, because they are free men. They will joyously die because they are no longer slaves to the Nazis. And, they praise me because I led them to this place, in this time, as free men. It is better to die as a free man than to die as a slave.*

For the first time in over four years, Jacob was happy. The splinter in his mind that drove him to become a leader, suddenly disappeared. Whatever had caused him to have the nightmare, and placed within him the need to lead men into battle, had suddenly been satisfied. *I have accomplished my mission. Or, is there still something else? Will there will be another day for me?* Jacob's thoughts were interrupted when he was put back down on the ground. He smiled and laughed and conversed with his men. All the while, the ubiquitous artillery drew closer and closer to the cave.

Chapter 64

The Last Day

Daylight slowly emerged from the dark, thunderous night. It was January 24, 1945, Jacob's last day to live. He drew all of his frozen, weak, starving soldiers together for one final meeting. They surrounded Jacob underneath the fluttering white flag with the blue Star of David emblazoned upon it. This would be his last speech as leader of the rebellion. This would be his farewell speech.

In the silence of the early morning, the only sound was the fluttering white and blue flag of the fledgling Hebrew army. Suddenly, the same large hawk appeared, riding the thermals high in the sky above. Jacob observed his soldiers with respect and admiration. *My comrades, today we will die together.*

Jacob's speech began with a shout. "First Brigade of the Fighters of Israel! I honor you!" Everyone's eyes were upon his eyes. The hawk squealed in the sky overhead, far above. "My comrades, you have defeated two full companies of German soldiers. And you continue to resist. Like David, you slew Goliath. Your names will be forever remembered among our people with honor and reverence. My friends, the Nazis are attempting to wipe out our people. They have imprisoned, tortured, starved and killed us. They performed medical experiments upon us. In every possible way, they have tried to turn us into animals. Yet, you have refused to die. You have refused to become an animal."

Pausing for a moment to collect his thoughts, Jacob continued in earnest. "I cannot tell you why God has allowed such a terrible thing to happen to our people. It is not for us to understand God's plan. But, I know that we are alive because we had the tenacity to fight and that we are Jews. I know that God gave us the courage to save our race. Even in the darkness and pain of captivity, we observed the Sabbath and the high holidays. And, because God bestows no greater treasure than the gift of life – we refuse to be killed. Gentlemen, there must be another generation of Jews."

Stragglers from the far end of the lines slowly returned to the cave. They were soon mesmerized by Jacob's heartfelt words. "We are by nature a peaceful people. We have no army, save you who now stand before me. Although we live precariously in our darkest moment, believe me when I tell you that your actions will lead to victory. Even if we are surrounded, even if we all die here today, word of your bravery will travel from mouth to mouth and from city to city. Soon, all of Europe will know of your steadfast bravery and capacity to fight for our survival. When the world discovers how we held back the mighty German army with but a few weapons and no training, others will fight. I ask you today to believe in God's plan for us – for our people. My friends, you have inspired me beyond measure. Leading you into the battle for our people's survival has been my greatest opportunity. Before our final battle, I ask you to pray with me." In unison, the small army of the Israelites recited the Mourner's Kaddish, reaffirm-

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ing their belief in one God and their commitment to the Jewish race.

In the large oak tree near the cave entrance, Karl Schmidt, carefully aimed his sniper's rifle. He had been trained to kill the leaders of the opposition. Without military uniforms, it was difficult to know who was the leader of the rebellious Jews. However, with patience he saw that no action was taken unless Jacob had approved it. The emaciated young man was clearly organizing the prisoner's fight. Now, while the group was looking down, murmuring their blasphemous prayer, he would take out their thin, limping leader. He adjusted the rifle's scope lever for the fresh wind and distance. Through the scope, he gazed upon Jacob's face. He placed the crosshairs on the center of Jacob's head and gently began to depress the trigger with his right index finger. *From this short distance, it will easily be my most accurate kill!* Suddenly, an explosion behind him shook the entire tree. He eased back on the trigger. *Damn! My own soldiers have ruined the shot! If they had attacked one second later, the Jewish leader would no longer own his head.*

The explosion marked the beginning of the third day of the German attack upon the escaped prisoners in the cave. It came from artillery which had been moved much closer during the night. The Germans could now pound the prisoners into submission before sending troops back up the road. For almost an hour, German artillery smashed into and around the cave. The torrent of exploding shells was deafening. One by one, Jacob's soldiers fell to direct hits or shrapnel. By mid-morning, they no longer had a bunker outside the cave. Only a scattering of rocks and torn timber remained.

Jacob dispersed his troops into the forest and behind rocks near the cave. Again, the Germans attacked from the road in both directions. This time, however, Jacob's runners reported the sound of tanks advancing toward the cave. And, this time the Germans seemed to be advancing directly from the west, as well. Jacob wondered if those troops were actually retreating from the Allies in the west. By early afternoon, he could hear the sound of sporadic small arms fire coming from the east, from the dense forest that was to be their only escape route. *We are finally surrounded. There is no place for us to escape.*

One by one, Jacob's troops ran out of ammunition. The sound of gunfire was growing in frequency and intensity. The Germans no longer feared attacking Jacob's bunkers, with their hidden machine guns. German mortars moved in and began firing shells towards the cave. Mounds of earth and splinters of wood erupted high into the air each time a shell landed. Jacob also saw bodies fly into the air. Moments later, German soldiers lobbed grenades into the bunker in front of the cave. Resistance was pointless, since most of Jacob's men who were in the bunker were now dead. Any survivors lacked ammunition. German mortar fire finally zeroed in on the cave. They poured it on from every direction, lobbing grenades and then pounding the cave with machine gun fire. It was the Jew's turn to be massacred. He wept thinking about his brave men dying all around him.

Suddenly, Jacob heard the sound of Germans shouting just outside the cave. *The end is near. My brave men and I will die together as free men. I only regret that I will never again see my beloved Rachael. Oh my dear, sweet wife, I love you and our child more than life itself. I pray that you are both alive and safe.*

The Last Day

Oh, Rachael... I miss you so much!

Jacob drew his men into the cave. So many were gone! The survivors gathered next to the flickering fire. The old Rabbi led them in prayer for several minutes. When he was finished, Jacob spoke to the shivering, wounded men. "My friends, the greatest opportunity of my life has been to lead you into battle. You have fought bravely, sons of Israel. Let it be forever known that this army fought to the last man. Let it be known that here, in this frozen cave, lie the bravest men who ever fought for their freedom. Let it be known that on this site, brave men stood up against tyranny. Let it be told that First Brigade of the Fighters of Israel fought and died here, for liberty, for honor and for the right to live freely as Jews." Jacob paused for a moment. When he continued, his mind was at ease. For the first time in his life, Jacob knew that he had done something special, something extraordinary. When he continued, it was with a smile. "Gentlemen, your bravery will echo throughout eternity."

Less than seventy fighters remained. Most had been wounded or injured. At most, forty men were able to hold a rifle and participate in one final bayonet charge. Jacob gave everyone a rifle and ordered them to fix bayonets. There were no bullets left. There were no grenades, no mines... only bayonets. Jacob ordered the survivors to engage the Germans in hand-to-hand combat. It would be his final order and their battle to the death. They would happily die as free men, fighting for their people's future. Jacob couldn't stop thinking about Rachael and their child. He thought about his parents. He missed them terribly, especially his father. *Oh father, I will soon join you in paradise. I pray that my actions will reflect positively upon our family name.*

The Germans began to lob grenades into the cave. There were brief, blinding explosions. Each explosion reverberated through the cave, leaving a lasting reminder of their violence. Jacob and his remaining fighters waited for the smoke to clear. They would then charge the enemy. It would be their final acts before death. Jacob glanced around the cave. Each man strong enough to hold a rifle stood in a crouched position, staring at the entrance. Their bayonets, like their resolve, pointed firmly towards the enemy. Despite starvation, despite disease, despite being injured and wounded, despite the fear that they would soon be shot dead – Jacob's brigade stood firm. Perhaps another group of men would have preferred surrender. But, not these men. These men, whose lives had been shattered, whose loved ones had been brutally murdered, stood ready to bravely spring into action. Because of Jacob's courage, they would die as heroes, rather than incinerate as human trash. Then, just as the sound of the gun battle had reached a crescendo at the entrance to the cave – it suddenly stopped. Moments later, there was a spattering of small arms fire outside the cave. Jacob stood near the fire, confused. *Why have they stopped shooting?* For a long moment there was nothing but silence. Jacob and his men looked at each other with surprised eyes.

Jacob prepared for the end of his life. *Here it comes – the moment of my death. Any second, German soldiers will burst into the cave with their guns blazing. Perhaps they will throw more grenades inside first. Either way, I will be dead within seconds.* Time seemed to stop as everyone waited for the smoke to clear. Their empty rifles pointed forward, with bayonets fixed. Jacob thanked

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God for giving him the nightmare, for providing him with the gift of premonition. He thanked God for preserving him until this fateful day and for surrounding him with the bravest men he had ever known. And, he thanked God for instilling within him the desire to lead men into battle. His life had come full circle. The message that was given to Moshe so many years ago had finally been achieved. Moshe's child, Jacob, had saved many of God's chosen people. Jacob prepared to die with the satisfaction that he had accomplished God's will. Suddenly, soldiers entered the cave. Every rifle was pointed at them. Without ammunition, no one could fire their weapon. *Why don't they fire at us? Why aren't they killing us?* Jacob stared at the incoming enemy. *Something is wrong here! They have no uniforms. Who are these intruders?*

Suddenly, Jacob understood. The people entering the cave were not Germans. They were partisans! "Cease fire! Cease fire," cried Jacob. And then, through the smoke he saw her. *No! It can't be!* At first, from a distance, he was not certain. *My mind is playing tricks!* Yet, as she came closer, he saw with amazement that it was indeed Rachael. Standing next to her was Anton Chrusciel.

At the same time, Rachael saw Jacob. She dropped her machine gun and raced to him. Barely able to stand on his own, Jacob fell into Rachael's arms. They tumbled in a heap upon the floor of the cave. In rapture, they kissed each other repeatedly. Each kiss was like a taste of heaven. With hearts pounding and tears flowing, Rachael and Jacob were together again.

"Is this a dream?" asked Jacob.

"Never, my love," replied Rachael. "We will never be separated again. I swear it!"

A hand grasped Jacob's shoulder and pulled him away from Rachael. It was Chrusciel. Jacob looked up and smiled. "Anton, I thought that you were dead." Chrusciel smiled at him.

"Yes, I've heard that a lot lately." They embraced as brothers.

"How did you find us?" asked Jacob. Chrusciel smiled again.

"The Americans are just over that hill, to the west," offered Chrusciel while pointing straight out from the cave entrance. Suddenly it began to make sense to Jacob. It was American artillery pounding the Germans.

Chrusciel continued, excitedly. "The Russians have been moving in steadily from the east. My partisans have been in the forest behind your cave, ahead of the Russians. We heard a lot of fighting coming from this area. At first, we thought that it was the Americans. Then, we received information that they were still at Linz. We could not imagine who was fighting the Germans here! Of course, we knew that someone was defending a cave. I recalled hearing a rumor about the Germans marching prisoners from Bratslava in this direction. We put two and two together and guessed that those prisoners had rebelled. Of course, we were not certain that the prisoners had come from Auschwitz. Still, we had to come to their aid." Chrusciel's smile disappeared for a moment. He looked into Jacob's eyes. "Jacob, how could you hold your own in battle against the Germans for so long?"

Jacob gazed back into Chrusciel's strong eyes. After a moment of silence, he smiled and replied. "My friend, it was God's will."

Chapter 65

Jacob's End

Karl Schmidt did not care that the battle was over. He did not care that his comrades were dead, injured or captured. He did not care that Germany had all but lost the war. He had accepted that taking out an enemy leader at this late stage would mean absolutely nothing to Germany. No, this was purely personal. This was his one chance to prove his talent. "I will show them," he spoke in a whisper. He caressed the sniper rifle, his constant companion of the past four miserable years. He would prove his skill to the world on this day. Carefully, he placed his right eye against the soft rubber end of the Leupold scope. Silently, he placed a bullet in the chamber and removed the weapon's safety. All that he had to do now was wait for that damn crippled leader to walk out.

Jacob, Rachael and Anton walked arm in arm to the front of the cave. Sporadic gunfire was diminishing outside. Every few seconds, there was the popping sound of a lone gunshot. However, the battle was over. Jacob's amazing army of Auschwitz survivors had won. "It must have been a miracle, Jacob," said Anton. "I don't think that the best general in any army could have accomplished this. Two hundred starved and diseased men defeated more than two companies of German infantry! My God, Jacob, it had to be a miracle!" Jacob turned to look at Rachael. *She is as beautiful as ever, if not more so!* They looked at each other, exchanging knowing smiles. Jacob felt relaxed for the first time in five years. He basked in his newfound contentment. *I almost forgot what it feels like to smile – to be happy!*

High in the old oak tree across from the cave entrance, Karl Schmidt peered through various targets in his finder scope. His winter sniper's uniform offered perfect camouflage. It was only a standard white winter uniform with what appeared to be random black splotches. But in the winter, with the world covered by various shades of black and white, he all but disappeared inside of the huge tree. Karl took his time evaluating targets. "Never be in a hurry to select targets!" his staff sergeant always told him. Karl hated to be near his superior officer. *The man had hideous breath!* However, he now accepted the advice. Karl had been observing the people in the cave for a very long time. And, that was long enough to learn who was in charge. He had his eyes on the young man with the bad limp since he arrived in the tree. Every minute or two, someone came to him. The constant parade of people made the cripple an excellent choice as the primary target. Karl had observed the defacto leader much longer than he needed to in order to get a good shot away. He had no idea why he waited, only that the time somehow did not yet feel right. There was that one moment when the stupid Jews were praying. He had a perfect shot then. But, his remaining comrades attacked and the moment was lost.

Now, after the waning moments of battle, his target again approached the

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front of the cave. This time, he was arm in arm with a woman and a man he had not seen before. *They must be partisans. Good! I will kill them as well.* Karl's mind was a carousel of thoughts. *The war is over! You do not need to shoot this man. He even appears to be unarmed!* Karl pulled away from the finder scope. Then, darker thoughts emerged in his impetuous mind. *You haven't one single kill in the entire war! That means that you are a loser! That means that you have failed... You have failed... You have failed!*

Karl put his right eye behind the scope again. This time, he placed his right index finger around the trigger. He saw the three unarmed people slowly coming out of the cave. They walked hand-in-hand, smiling and laughing. His target, the cripple, was in the middle. "I will give you something to laugh about, cripple! This is for attacking my friends." Karl slowly squeezed the trigger, until his sniper rifle came to life with a flash of light, a bang and the anticipated kick in his right shoulder.

As Jacob was walked through the damp cave towards the entrance, a small group of partisans stood outside in the fading sunlight. They chatted excitedly about the battle. A man named Claude was talking to his friend Louis when he saw a glare coming from the large oak tree beyond them. It was only there for a moment. But, he had been trained to search for a sniper. Now, for the first time, he had found one. By nature, Claude was a nervous and jumpy man. He was prone to fits of anxiety. He also had a speech defect – stuttering. His heart leapt up into his throat. Claude was captured by the excitement of the moment. Unfortunately, all that he could manage to do was point his finger and stutter. Two seconds passed. "What did you say?" replied Louis, with a startled expression. Another two seconds passed as Louis turned around to examine the source of Claude's agitation.

A few seconds later, Claude was able to put two words together. He screamed, "In there!" Suddenly, there was a popping sound and a puff of smoke appeared inside the tree.

Jacob had reached the front of the cave, still walking hand-in-hand with Rachael and Anton. Golden late day sunlight poured its warmth upon their cold, tired bodies. *It feels good.* Jacob mentioned something about it being "God's will" that he had defeated a German armored company. Anton looked at Jacob and smiled. "My friend, you look like you need a rest." Jacob, still smiling, looked down at his emaciated body. *He thinks that I need a rest! He has no idea!*

Jacob looked back at Anton, and then at Rachael. *My work is done!* Then, he spoke aloud. "Perhaps God will give me some time off now."

Just as Jacob completed his sentence, he heard a man outside scream, "In there!" Suddenly, Jacob's chest exploded as a bullet tore through his frail body. The bullet exited Jacob's back with a spray of blood, cloth and tissue. He fell from the arms of Rachael and Anton upon the cold, damp cave floor.

Outside, Claude, Louis and the other men sprung into action. Karl might have been well hidden, but Claude saw the sunlight reflect from his finder scope. Then, several partisans saw the puff of smoke from the sniper's rifle. The partisans fired upon the old oak tree mercilessly. Hundreds of bullets flew through

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the old tree. Karl moved back in a vain attempt to flee. As he tried to climb down the tree, he was caught in a hail of gunfire and fell to the ground. He lived long enough to realize that his death prevented any mention of his kill to his countrymen. His astounded mind was crippled with this terrifying concept. *No one will know of my kill!* Then, his heart stopped.

Jacob lay bleeding upon the cave floor. He gasped for air, feeling one lung short. *I've been shot! Oh God, I've been shot!* Blood was filling his lung, where the bullet left extensive damage. He was able to move his arms and legs. *It did not hit my spine!* But, Jacob found it almost impossible to breathe. He could inhale only small amounts of air before his lungs felt full. When he expelled his breath, there was a gurgling sound in his throat. Another unusual sound came from his chest with each breath.

Rachael jumped to cover Jacob's body with her own, in an effort to protect him from additional bullets. Now, she pulled herself away. Her face was twisted with shock and anxiety. She screamed at Jacob in a trembling voice. "Jacob!" she urged. "Please, stay here! Stay with me. Don't you dare leave me!" she screamed. Jacob stared back at her with wide eyes and panting breaths, unable to speak. Tears streamed down Rachael's face. She turned white as a ghost. *She is going into shock. She should place her head between her legs. That would keep more blood in... her... brain.* Jacob was very dizzy and weak. Worse yet, he was now extremely cold. He had never been this cold and it frightened him. *Need... need... blood.*

Jacob lay over a large pool of his blood. In the darkness of the cave, it appeared black. Rachael's arm was under his neck and she gently tried to lift his head up. He choked on blood so she put his head back down. He was trying to speak to her. His complexion was white and his lips were turning blue. She realized that he was talking. But, she could not hear his whispers. Rachael placed her ear over his mouth and heard him distinctly say, "I love you Rachael. And, I love our child." He tried to say something else, but she could not hear. Bending over Jacob's ear, she listened intently. Suddenly, she shrieked. When she looked up at Anton, he saw terror in her eyes. "No!" she screamed at Jacob. "Not that!" Then, his eyes turned up in their sockets and he passed out. "What was he saying?" asked Anton. Rachael looked at him with wide eyes. "He was saying the Shema. He was preparing to die!"

Rachael screamed at everyone. "Please, someone, help me! Please help me!" Suddenly, Anton picked up Jacob's light, limp body and began to carry him away. Rachael screamed, "No!" She grasped the Anton's leg and held on tightly. "We go together! Come on!" she screamed. Together, they ran with Jacob to a nearby truck. It was the truck filled with arms and ammunition that Jacob's troops had captured. That truck gave Jacob's brigade the means to defeat an enemy with overwhelmingly superior force. It now carried the dying leader's torn body.

The truck raced towards Bratslava, leaving behind a trail of smoke, dust and debris. Jacob ventured into and out of consciousness, with less and less blood. The road was very bumpy and Jacob bounced along with it. Fading in and out of consciousness, he grew very cold and began to shiver. His complex-

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ion was ashen, with dark circles around his sad eyes.

Jacob was near death. His brain was starving for oxygen and nourishment. When he thought it couldn't get any worse, Jacob's chest exploded in pain. His heart was also starved of nourishment. *Which organ will fail first?* Jacob was pleased to see Rachael one final time. *What a gift! Thank you, Lord!* He tried to recall his last important thought. *Yes, that's it. I was trying to say, "my job is done!"* And, *God responded. Perhaps He was telling me that my job is not done. If only I could live a little while longer. I would dedicate my life to saving more of my people.*

Chapter 66

Guilt

Jacob woke up with a start. He tried to sit up, reaching for a pistol on his right side that was absent. There was tremendous pain in his chest. Every movement was painful. His eyes darted about in every direction. If his pistol was where he thought it would be, he would have shot someone. He fell back upon the bed in exhaustion and pain. In a moment, he realized that he was in a hospital. Suddenly, soft hands caressed his face and neck and his beloved wife's face appeared before him. "Settle down, Jacob," she whispered. "You're in a hospital in Bratslava. You are going to be all right. Jacob, we are both safe."

Adrenaline had taken over and he was trembling. Jacob tried to calm himself down. *I was in that cave where we fought the Germans. Was I shot? Yes. I thought that I was dying.* Slowly, his memory returned. He grasped Rachael's face and kissed her. "I was dreaming again," he replied. "I was back in that cave and the Germans were coming in." He fell back into his pillow in weakness. He had never felt so weak, not even when he had been starved and tortured. He tried to sit up again and could not. "How long was I out?" he asked in a voice barely audible.

"Don't worry, Jacob," whispered Rachael. "You're safe now. But, you were unconscious for a long time. Oh, my God, Jacob, we thought that you died on the trip here. We could not find your pulse. You must have lost so much blood that your heart was barely pumping. The Americans operated on you as soon as we arrived. Jacob, they had to remove a portion of your lung. That was almost two weeks ago."

Jacob fell back again in exhaustion. *I've been unconscious for two weeks?* Looking around, he saw doctors and nurses racing back and forth. Rachael put her head on his chest. Tears streamed down her face. "We almost lost you, Jacob. You and your men were so malnourished that we feared you would all die. I prayed that you would wake up. I prayed so much. I guess God was listening."

Jacob hated to see Rachael crying. He stroked her face with his hand, wiping the tears away. "Yes, my love. I believe that God was listening. It turned out that He had a plan for me, after all. Rachael, you are so beautiful. I will never stop loving you!"

Rachael picked her head up and gazed into Jacob's eyes. He saw confusion and fear in her eyes. *Something is troubling her. What is it?* She opened her mouth to say something and abruptly stopped. Moments later, she spoke quietly. "Jacob, my love. I will love you forever and beyond. I was so afraid that we might lose you. But, you are going to live, Jacob. We have a lot to live for." No sooner did Rachael say this than she looked down. *Something terrifying is on her mind.* Jacob felt himself slipping back into unconsciousness. He squinted his eyes and took in a deep breath, concentrating on his surroundings. *I'm so*

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lightheaded. But, I must stay awake. The busy hospital room was spinning around. A loud buzzing sound filled his ears. His vision was beginning to turn gray.

Before slipping back into the soft, silent darkness, he asked Rachael, “What about our baby?” But, the darkness closed upon him again. If she answered, he was too far gone to hear.

The next time that Jacob awoke, he felt stronger. Rachael was again next to him. She looked haggard and troubled. Dark circles under her eyes revealed a lack of sleep. Her moist, red eyes suggested a recent episode of crying. Rachael was startled when Jacob picked himself up in the bed. He smiled at her. She smiled and hugged his neck and bony shoulders. He grasped her hands and held them tight. He looked into her smile and his soul melted into hers. *My God, I've missed that wonderful smile. I survived to see it again! Heaven must be like this.*

Rachael told him that he had been unconscious for another three days. The American army doctors did not know why he had slipped back into the darkness again. Momentarily, Jacob recalled their last conversation and that Rachael had something important to say. This time, he wasted no time in asking about their child. “Rachael, where is our baby?”

For a long time, she said nothing. Jacob's heart sank. He realized that something was wrong. *No! Oh my God, did they kill our child?* “You told me when I was in Auschwitz that our baby was fine. You said that he was with a Jewish family in a farm house. You told me that there was nothing to worry about!” But the look on Rachael's face told him otherwise. Jacob fought panic as it rose within him. His heart was pounding. He began to perspire. The fear within his mind was palpable. *Oh, God, please don't say that our baby has died!* Yet, the look on Rachael's face foretold the unkind truth.

Rachael had fought against this for so long. *How can I tell my husband that the baby is dead. He was my responsibility. And now, he is dead. What if he will hate me because of it? What if he will no longer love me? My God, I could not go on living without Jacob. He is my life.* Tears flowed down Rachael's face. Her hands were trembling. She hid them underneath her skirt. She looked down, despondent and fearful.

Jacob had never seen Rachael this way. She seemed on the verge of a breakdown. He stared at her, his mouth wide open and his eyes transfixed upon her face. A woman's heart is filled with secrets. Some of those secrets may be told. Others must never reach the light of day. Now, she stared at her husband in abject fear. *How much should I tell him? Her mind was whirling. I will tell him how little Anton died. But I will never tell him about the child's father. After all, how could he live with me if he knew that I had been raped by that evil Nazi commandant.*

Finally, the words stumbled out by themselves. “Jacob, our son is dead. Anton and I left him with two wonderful people. I told you about the Levins. They promised to protect our little Anton with their lives. They *loved* him, Jacob. But, the Gestapo discovered them.” The tears and shaking again overpowered Rachael and she was unable to speak. She cried for a long time. Finally, she

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stood up. "I must get something to drink," she gasped as she ran out of the room.

Rachael returned a few minutes later, carrying a handkerchief and a glass of water. She seemed to be more composed. Jacob stared at her. Part of him hoped that she would change the subject and never again bring it up. But he had to know what happened to his son. He felt that it was even more important for Rachael to tell him the truth. *Whatever she has been hiding is eating away at her, like a cancer.* She sat next to him and tenderly placed her arm around his shoulder. Looking directly into Jacob's eyes, she spoke softly. "As soon as we brought you here, Anton went back to Poland to bring our son back to us. He found..." Rachael stopped in mid sentence. The tears came back. Her breath hitched twice and she finally found the strength to continue. "Jacob, he found that little Anton was..." Again, Rachael stopped. This time, she broke down completely. Jacob held her in his arms for several minutes as she cried uncontrollably.

Jacob put his hands around Rachael's face. He wiped her tears away gently. Finally, she inhaled deeply and pulled away. Straightening her skirt and blouse, Rachael sat up and looked again into Jacob's eyes. This time, she insisted to herself that she must finish the story. "Anton went to the farmhouse where the Levins were taking care of the baby. No one was there. He broke in and saw the furniture in disarray. Bullet holes were everywhere. There was a great deal of blood in the house. But, the place was empty and there was no message. Anton went from house to house asking what happened. No one would talk to him. Finally, he found a family nearby who let him in. They told him that one day, a few months ago, they heard gunshots from the farm where little Anton stayed. The Gestapo was there. After the Gestapo left, the neighbors walked to the house and looked into a window. Jacob, they saw... something terrible." Rachael's mouth began to quiver. She swallowed hard. *This will be the worst part of it. But, I must say it.* "They saw the bodies of the Levins and our little Anton in the living room on the floor. The door was still open, so they went inside. It was too late, Jacob. They were all dead."

Jacob was grateful to hear the truth, even though he had feared it. He wept inside for the child, but was relieved that Rachael had finally been able to tell the truth. He realized that it must have been an enormous relief for her. *There, it is out. It is what I have feared and what she feared saying to me. My God, our son is dead. After everything the Nazis have done to us, why did they have to take our only child? Oh, dear sweet God. This is too much to bear. No parent should live longer than their child. Oh, the pain! Our son is gone! What could he have accomplished – for himself and for the world? Who would he have married? What would his children be like? My Silverman name now lives on the brink of extinction. Alas, little Anton will not grow up. He will never know what it is like to play, to be with loving parents, to feel warm sunlight upon his face, to make love with his wife, to have his own family. What right do these Nazis have to take away our future?*

Jacob cried quietly in his hospital bed. Rachael put her arms around him as she too cried. They tried to comfort each other. Yet, such deep, intense pain cannot be comforted away. The pain stabbed into Jacob's consciousness. They

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held each other, weeping for a long time. Finally, Rachael spoke. When Jacob looked into her eyes, he saw that something else was wrong.

“What is it Rachael? What else do you have to tell me? I can see it in your face. What else is wrong?”

Rachael took a deep breath and began slowly. “Jacob, the Gestapo discovered that I was Jewish when I was in the hospital. I remember that something very bad happened when I woke up there. For some reason, the doctors put me to sleep. I can't recall for certain, but I think that maybe I was in an accident going to the hospital. I left Anton on the doorstep of a farm family after he had been shot. I drove to the hospital. I think that my water broke along the way. And then, all that I can recall is darkness. But, I think that I woke up in the hospital briefly. Our baby was already born. When I saw a nurse, I asked her something bad. Jacob, I think that I asked her for the Hebrew date.” Tears streamed out as Rachael spoke. She trembled with fear. “Oh, Jacob, I was so tired and confused. I wasn't thinking clearly. I was stupid! I gave away that we were Jews. Jacob, it's my fault that little Anton is dead!”

Rachael fell into a long, agonizing fit of crying. Jacob had never seen her cry like this before. He had never seen anyone weep so intensely. She sobbed and hitched and heaved and still, more tears came. All the while her entire body was shaking. Jacob comforted her as best he could. Something deep inside told him that Rachael needed to bring her guilt into the open. Long ago, his father told him that guilt is the most powerful and destructive human emotion. Unresolved, it can turn a kind person into something ugly and fearsome. But Rachael had finally been able to bring her ugly secret into the open, hopefully healing herself in the process. He stroked her shiny, dark hair. Over and over, he repeated, “It was not your fault, Rachael. The Nazis killed little Anton. It was not your fault. It was not your fault.”

After a long time, Rachael stopped crying. After wiping the tears from her face, she picked her head up and began to speak. “Jacob, the nurse that I had spoken with must have contacted the Gestapo, because one of those monsters came to my room in the hospital one day. He tried to pin me down as a Jew and as a partisan. Oh, God, I was so frightened for our little baby. That was when Freda and Sol came into my room. Anton had contacted them in Poland and they offered to take care of us. When I was about to be arrested, they came and took me out of the hospital. Apparently, the Gestapo followed us from the hospital to the farm house. Then, after I left with Anton, they must have come in demanding to know who we were and if I was in the partisans. For a few months, the Levins and I pretended to be Christians. We put no mezuzah upon the house and celebrated the Jewish holidays and the Sabbath only behind closed doors. We even joined a church in the nearby town. But, it must not have convinced the Gestapo. Anton said that some of the neighbors suspected that we were Jews and told the Gestapo that I had gone to join the partisans. The Gestapo wanted to know where to find us. But, none of the neighbors knew that. Freda and Sol promised to take care of little Anton until we returned. They saved me from the Gestapo when I was in the hospital. But, they could not save our baby. Jacob, all three of them were killed in that farm house. Our little Anton is dead. And, it's my fault for

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asking the nurse about the Hebrew date!”

Rachael broke down in tears, sobbing in Jacob’s arms. She cried uncontrollably for a long time. Yet, she also sensed a tremendous weight lifted from her heart. She felt healing begin with the telling of her story. And, she sensed that Jacob would never blame her for the death of their son. But now, she felt Jacob’s intense shock and sorrow. She grieved and cried now for Jacob and his pain. Finally, she cried herself to sleep in Jacob’s arms.

Chapter 67

Resettlement

On August 2nd, Jacob sat in front of their barracks in the American-controlled resettlement camp. The day was stifling hot, without a breath of wind. He watched the camp's main square with minimal interest. After the war ended, it was crowded with refugees. Now, almost everyone was gone. Once in a while, he saw a person walk slowly across the open parade ground. The camp was practically a ghost town, now that almost all of the survivors had been resettled. The American flag in the center of the square rested limp upon its pole. Rachael had gone to the commissary, leaving Jacob alone in the barracks. He had come out hoping to feel a slight breeze, but was disappointed that there was none. Rachael and Jacob were now the only survivors in the barracks. In his left hand was an orange. It was the largest orange he had ever seen. Someone told him that it was from Palestine. In his right hand was a bright red apple. Jacob smiled as he recalled his first embarrassing moments in the American commissary.

When he was strong enough to leave the hospital, he and Rachael had begun to eat at the commissary. Like the other concentration camp survivors, Jacob looked like a walking skeleton. He weighed less than a hundred pounds when he arrived. The Nazis had given him a watery gruel for breakfast and a watery soup for dinner. Once in a while, he was given a crust of stale bread, or a scrap of maggoty meat.

On his first day in the American commissary, he stopped dead in his tracks. Looking ahead, he saw two large barrels. One was filled with apples. The other was filled with oranges. Standing guard next to the barrels was a very large black American soldier. Jacob assumed that the oversized American was guarding the food. Meanwhile, Jacob was transfixed over his decision. After a long, awkward moment, the American said, "What's your problem?" Jacob, using the best English that he could muster, said, "Which of these fruits may I take?" The American stared at him for a moment and then suddenly began to laugh. When he stopped laughing he smiled at Jacob and he said, "Man, you can take as many of these apples and oranges as you want!"

Still perspiring on the steps of his barracks, Jacob looked down at the apple and took a large bite. It was tender and sweet. The juice ran down from his mouth to his chin. *I can eat as much as I want to now! Oh, God, I have missed food so much.* He promised that he would never forget what starvation was like. And, he promised to help others who were starving, as much as he could.

While savoring his apple, Jacob thought about all of the people who had helped him to stay alive, but who were now dead. In his mind, he saw Hershel, Chaim, David, Eli and the old Rabbi. He saw Anna, Simcha and he saw his beloved parents. He saw the men that he led into battle. They too died helping

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him to stay alive. The sadness weighed heavily upon Jacob. Yet, he knew that he would never stop seeing these beloved people for the rest of his life. They had become burned into his mind permanently. He owed them so much. Jacob decided to dedicate the rest of his life to helping others in need, just as those who haunt his memory had helped him.

In the months since his rescue, Jacob had gained back some of the weight he had lost. Rachael also gained some weight and looked almost as she did before the war had ripped their lives apart. The American doctors told him that there was nothing they could do for his damaged left knee. He might need to use a cane for the rest of his life, they said. Jacob accepted this disability with grace and realized that he was among the fortunate few camp prisoners who had survived. It was better to be a cripple and alive than to be dead.

He often thought about his family and friends who did not survive. The death of his parents had left a deep, intense pain and longing. A cavernous dark hole existed in his soul, in the spot where his parents had resided. Jacob understood that this new darkness would remain forever. His life could never be the same without his father. He thought about the friends he had made in the camps. Very few of them were still alive. He thought about being captured, escaping and being recaptured. He recalled the brutal torture that the Nazis employed to make him reveal information about the partisans. He was proud of his silence. He remembered the torture with electricity and someone pulling out his fingernails with pliers. He recalled how his life had been reduced to almost nothing. He remembered that he had to capture and eat insects in his prison cell, just to stay alive.

More than anything, Jacob felt like an orphan. At the same time, he felt guilty for being a survivor. He was surprised how strong the feeling of guilt was. But, whenever he felt this despair, he recalled how he and his troops had broken out of captivity into freedom and how wonderful it felt to fight the Nazis and to finally win. *I never thought that I would lead men into battle. All that I ever wanted was to be with Rachael and my parents, and to be a doctor. I had no training at all in leadership or military tactics. Yet, somehow it was my destiny to use both during the greatest moments of my life. I can only conclude that God wanted me to be a survivor.*

Jacob was startled from his deep thoughts by a stirring in front of the commissary. Some people were running towards it. Then, he saw Rachael standing in front. She was waving her arms in Jacob's direction. *She wants me to come there.* Jacob ran as fast as he could to the commissary. As the doctors had predicted, he was out of breath half way there. His chest hurt when he ran. He was told that it was due to scar tissue from the bullet and subsequent surgery. When he arrived, Rachael pulled him inside where a large group of people had surrounded a radio that was tuned into the BBC news. The news announcer seemed nervous and spoke very loud. "Something big just happened," said an American soldier who was standing next to Rachael.

Jacob strained to hear what the announcer was saying. His voice was rushed and there was much static. In a strained, high-pitched voice with a strong British accent, the announcer rambled on. "Once again, for listeners who may have just

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joined us, today the American armed forces exploded an atom bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It has been reported that the bomb, which destroyed the entire city, killed almost 100,000 people. Upon the instant of the explosion, an intense white light covered the city. Many who looked into this light were blinded. The massive light was followed by an enormous explosion that covered the entire city. The bomb produced a tremendous cloud of ash and debris which rained radiation down upon those still alive. It is said that the cloud resembled a huge mushroom. Hospitals in nearby cities are overflowing with dying patients. Radiation sickness is widespread and the water is poisoned by it. Now we switch you to our BBC reporter who filed this report just moments ago. We have recorded it on a disc and now play it back for you.”

There was a moment of static, followed by the deeper voice of another man speaking with a British accent. There was also a great deal of background noise. It sounded like people screaming in the background. The reporter spoke in rapid-fire sentences, barely taking enough time to breathe as he spoke. “This is Richard Catlett reporting from a hospital just fifteen miles from what is left of Hiroshima. The city itself is gone. No buildings remain standing. Everything has been reduced to rubble. There are now only piles of ashes where people stood at the time of the explosion. A few survivors remain in the river, where they went to cool their massive burns. The death toll is over 100,000 and climbing. Those who survived the blast are now sick with radiation poisoning. We are told by doctors that very few will survive. And, those that do survive may suffer from a variety of cancers later in life. All around me people lie in cots or on the floor in agony. The carnage here is unparalleled. Never before has a single bomb caused so much death and destruction. The American armed forces are saying almost nothing. They indicated that the bomb was delivered by a single bomber and that more such atomic bombs will fall upon Japanese cities unless they surrender unconditionally.”

Jacob looked at the others in the commissary. Everyone was transfixed by the words of the announcer, who continued unabated. “Now, we have a witness to the bombing here to speak with our BBC audience. The man’s name is Hiratu Soiku. Mr. Soiku was standing in front of his grocery store when the bomb exploded. I will be speaking to him through a BBC translator. Mr. Soiku, please tell us what you saw this morning.”

Jacob could barely hear the voice of the translator as the BBC announcer apparently did not bring the microphone close to his mouth. Someone turned the radio volume up as far as it would go. In a moment, the sound of Mr. Soiku’s voice could be heard, followed by the translator’s voice. The translator droned on in a voice that sounded both exhausted and angry. “About eight thirty this morning, I was standing in front of my store talking to a friend. We could hear the engines of a large airplane overhead. There was no anti-aircraft fire or air raid siren. Suddenly, there was a blinding flash of white light. This flash was a thousand times brighter than the sun. At the instant of the light, everyone around me looked like a skeleton. For a second, we could look through them right to the bones. I saw every bone in my friend’s body, like some sort of huge X-ray machine had gone off. My friend, who was looking up when it happened, screamed,

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'I'm blind, I'm blind.' I was spared because I was looking away from the light. Suddenly, there was the sound of a million trains and a wind so powerful that it knocked me all the way into the back of my store. Within a fraction of a second, there was a massive explosion. I must have been in the right place because I survived while my store was completely destroyed. The roof of my store was blown off and I looked up into the explosion. There was a roiling fireball over the entire city. The flames went higher than the clouds. It looked like a giant, exploding mushroom cloud."

The man paused while the translator finished his words. The BBC reporter interjected, "And, what happened then, Mr. Soiku?"

Again, they had to wait for the survivor to speak and for the translator to turn his words into English. "After the fireball, things began to rain down from the sky. I stood up and walked out into the street. Wherever a person stood, there was now only a pile of ashes. In some places on the sidewalk, you could see a shadow of someone who had been there at the explosion, as if it had been burned into the concrete. Then, it began to rain ashes. The ash fell everywhere and piled up like gray snow. I walked to the river and saw thousands of people there screaming. They were burned horribly and tried to soothe themselves in the water. Layer after layer of their skin was peeling off. I walked and walked until I finally found this hospital."

The voice of the BBC announcer was back. "Mr. Soiku, have you been able to locate members of your family or your friends?" The reply was a single word – "no." After a charged moment of silence, the announcer returned. "I'm sorry, but the doctors have taken Mr. Soiku away. Once again, the American armed forces have detonated what they call an atom bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The entire city and most of its inhabitants are gone. The dead were apparently vaporized where they stood. The survivors are almost all victims of radiation poisoning, rendering them exceedingly ill, with vomiting, diarrhea and skin lesions. Most of the victims of radiation poisoning, we are told, will not survive. We are surrounded in the hospital by the sick and dying. The stench of death and destruction is everywhere. The smell is so strong it seems to go right into one's body. Everywhere people are in agony. The survivors have almost routinely lost their family and friends. This is by far the most horrific scene witnessed by this reporter in my long years as a journalist. I now return you to your BBC station."

Someone turned the radio volume down as the BBC home announcer took over. Jacob and Rachael looked at each other with wide eyes and open mouths. The commissary was silent for a moment. Then, it turned into pandemonium. Conversations broke out among the listeners. Some of the American soldiers hollered and yelped in glee. There was much happy back-slapping and hand shaking. Smiles were everywhere. Jacob heard the American soldiers talking wildly with each other. One of them said, "I heard they tested one of these in New Mexico or Arizona."

Another soldier said, "No it was Nevada, and it lit up the night sky just like it was midday. My aunt saw it and she was a hundred miles away. It was brighter than the sun." Other comments were of a strategic nature.

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A nearby soldier said, "This will help end the war quickly and save a lot of lives." Someone else said, "The Japs will have to give up the fight now."

Jacob turned and walked away with Rachael, hand in hand. He was deep in thought. For a long time, neither of them said a word. Finally, Rachael spoke. "How horrible it must be for those Japanese. Most of the victims were not even soldiers. Of course, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor did little to generate American sympathy." They walked hand-in-hand in silence through the burning summer heat.

When they reached their barracks, Jacob finally spoke. "The world has just changed, Rachael. Whoever has the atom bomb can rule the world. Right now, it's the Americans. But, you can bet that the Russians will build one. Then the Chinese will, and so on. The race is on. This is important Rachael – more so than any of us realize."

Rachael seemed lost in thought. "What is it," asked Jacob. She sat on the step in front of their barracks.

Jacob sat next to her. "Jacob, where are we going to go?" Her sad expression told Jacob that this conversation was long overdue.

He sighed. "We've got a lot to think about, my love. We could go back to Salzburg. But, our apartments have surely been taken by others who assumed that we were dead or that we had moved somewhere else. Besides, there are no more Jews in Salzburg. Who would we live with? The only synagogue was burned to the ground. What kind of life would we have there? We've been told countless times not to go east. Russia controls all of Eastern Europe now and they still hate Jews there. We've tried to get immigration visas for England, France, Spain, Switzerland and America. It's too late for us, Rachael. While I was recovering in the hospital, all of the other survivors grabbed the available immigration visas. Those countries have immigration quotas for Jews and they have all been filled." They gazed silently into the dirt in front of the steps, despondent.

Rachael finally broached a tender subject. "Jacob, you always wanted to go to medical school. It was so important to you." He glanced at Rachael and looked back down into the sandy soil.

After a long pause, he looked at Rachael with sad eyes. "That was a lifetime ago, Rachael. That was when my father was alive and we had money for school. Now, he's gone and our family fortune has been stolen by the Nazis. I have no job, no money and no way to pay for medical school. With my bad leg, who knows if I can work a job?"

The next day, despite a steady rain, Jacob felt better than he had for a very long time. Rachael walked with him to the commissary, where they played chess all afternoon. There were only a handful of people in the building. An elderly man sat nearby in an overstuffed brown leather chair, staring at a postcard. The place was as quiet as a library. Rachael stretched her legs and arms as she yawned absently. "I'm going to get something to drink. Would you like a tea?" Jacob also stretched his frame and smiled softly.

"Sure, I would love some," he replied.

Rachael got up to get the refreshments. As she walked past the old man,

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she saw the picture on the postcard and stopped dead in her tracks. She stared at the postcard, her mouth open and eyes wide with surprise. With a sense of urgency, she called out to Jacob. "Jacob, come here please." The old man seemed impervious to Rachael's ongoing stare. When Jacob arrived, Rachael simply pointed to the picture postcard lying on the old man's lap. Jacob's reaction was similar. He gaped at the picture, and then looked at Rachael with wide eyes.

They stared at each other for a moment before smiling. Rachael spoke first. "Is that...?"

Before she could complete her sentence, Jacob began nodding with a broad smile. "Yes, Rachael. That is a picture of the place in my dream where we walk with our son." Rachael smiled back at him.

"Jacob, this picture is exactly the same place that I have visited in my dreams, as well. We walk with our beautiful child on the side of this mountain."

Jacob nodded his head in excitement. Then, his smile diminished. "It is also where someone fires artillery shells upon a small agricultural village."

Rachael spoke while continuing to stare at the picture. "Yes, the same thing happens in my dreams." The old man, who seemed oblivious to their indiscretion, did not move. Jacob bent forward to speak to him and realized that he was asleep. He tapped the old man's left shoulder.

Instantly, the old man's eyes opened and he sat upright in the large chair. His knees creaked noticeably when he straightened his legs. The old man looked up at Jacob with bright blue eyes. His face was old and wrinkled. But his sparkling eyes were filled with life. Rachael and Jacob sat in small wooden chairs on either side of the old man. Jacob spoke first. "I am sorry to wake you up. But, I must ask you about the postcard that you have here. Please, it is very important to us."

Rachael smiled at the old man and gently placed her hand upon the old man's. It was wrinkled and covered with age spots. But, it was warm and soft. "Yes, please accept our apology," she added. "You see, my husband and I have seen that mountain and valley." Rachael suddenly stopped, trying to select the best words. *If we tell him that we dreamed about it, he will believe we are mad.*

Jacob saved her by continuing. "My name is Jacob Silverman," he said, extending his hand. While the old man shook it, Jacob added, "And this is my wife, Rachael." The old man smiled.

"I am Sidney Feldstein," replied the old man, still shaking Jacob's hand.

Jacob continued. "You might not believe this, but there is a very important reason why we need to know where this place is located." He pointed at the postcard.

"Nothing surprises me any longer," replied the old man. "You do not know the name of this place?" Jacob and Rachael shook their heads silently.

The excitement was building with each passing second. Unbelievably, this old man had a picture of the exact location of their common dreams. It was astounding. Their hearts were pounding with suspense.

Slowly, the old man picked up the card. He said, "This is from my daughter, in Palestine. She wants me to join her there, on a communal farm called a kibbutz." As he brought the card up to his face, Jacob and Rachael bent forward.

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Their eyes were wide with apprehension. The tiny print that identified the location of this glorious picture might well become their new home.

The old man continued in his soft voice. "She wants me with her, although I haven't the slightest concept of farming. I was a lawyer. What do I know about farming? And, it is a dangerous place for Jews. Of course, the world is a dangerous place for us." The old man's voice continued, although Rachael and Jacob no longer processed his words. They stared at the tiny print as it came up towards them. Jacob bent forward as far as he could, gazing at the postcard intently. Finally, the print was large enough to read. It said, simply, "The Golan Heights."

Jacob instantly said it aloud and then repeated it. "The Golan Heights. The Golan Heights. Where on earth is this place?"

Jacob felt his heart pounding and blood rushing to his head. He was suddenly dizzy. He couldn't bear the suspense any longer. Rachael still stared at the picture, her mouth agape. The old man looked up at Jacob and offered a slight smile before he spoke. "It is in the Palestinian Territories. It is in the north, near Syria. My daughter tells me about how Jews live there now in farming villages. Everyone is treated as equals. They all have assigned jobs. It sounds like very hard work. And, most of the local Arabs hate them. In her last letter, she said that sometimes the Arabs shell them from the top of the mountain."

Feldstein turned the card over and allowed them to read it. "Here," pointed Feldstein towards a paragraph. It said, "We have been in constant communication with many other kibbutzim, as well as with the Haggana and the Irgun. Arms shipments come in almost every day. We are still weak. But, one day we will have to fight. Then, with God's will, we will become a country." Jacob asked what "Haggana" and "Irgun" meant, but Feldstein had no idea.

Again, Jacob and Rachael stared at each other. The excitement was palpable. The old man was himself becoming excited. "What?" he exclaimed as his gaze went back and forth from Jacob to Rachael.

Rachael spoke first. "Well, Mr. Feldstein. I have been dreaming of this exact place. In my dream, I walk there with Jacob and our child."

Jacob interrupted. "Yes, but she is talking about our child who has not yet been born!"

Feldstein stared at them, still holding the card up before his face. Jacob continued, "For a long time, I have been having exactly the same dream. This picture is the place in every respect, right down to the shadows and rocks. It is as though I was there and took this picture."

Feldstein began to smile. "My son, it seems to me that perhaps your dream was a gift from God. Since your beautiful wife has had the same dream, it might be providence. Perhaps God wants you to go there. I have always believed that he speaks to us all. We only need to listen and understand his message. What do you think?"

Rachael and Jacob smiled and thanked the old man for his time and for allowing them to view his postcard. They drank their tea in silence and began the slow walk back to their empty barracks. As they walked, Jacob's mind was occupied with the picture. It drew him to that mountain, like a magnet.

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After a long pause, Jacob spoke in a tenuous voice. “We could go to Palestine, Rachael. They say that many refugees from the Nazi camps have gone there. I’ve even heard some people talk about starting a Jewish homeland there. Of course, we would have to learn a new language. Besides our prayers, we really haven’t spoken much Hebrew. But, we could do it. What do you think?”

Rachael looked deep into Jacob’s animated eyes. Finally she spoke. “It would be dangerous. The Arabs won’t like Jews creating a homeland there. We could find ourselves prisoners again.” There was a long silence. Then, Rachael smiled. “But, what better way to use our new fighting skills, eh?” They laughed together and stopped to rest under a huge poplar tree. Enjoying its shade, they held each other tightly – smiling at each other.

Rachael’s smile was short-lived. She suddenly turned serious. “Jacob,” she said softly. “There might be one small problem with me, in terms of fighting for the freedom of our people.”

Jacob’s heart skipped a beat. Dark thought swirled through his mind. *Was she injured somehow? Is she seriously ill?* “What is it Rachael?” he asked in a whisper. Jacob steeled himself for the bad news.

“Well, my husband. Pregnant people should probably try to avoid hand-to-hand combat.”

Jacob stared at her for a long moment. Finally, he stammered, “What did you say?”

She grasped his warm hands in hers. “You heard me quite well, young Mr. Silverman. I said that I’m pregnant.”

A huge smile erupted on Jacob’s face. He pulled her hands up and began to kiss them. Then, he grasped Rachael’s face in his hands and said, “I have an idea what he’ll look like.” They laughed and kissed and held each other for hours.

Rachael finally spoke. “Let’s do it, Jacob. Besides, you know that both of us have had dreams about it.” Jacob realized that they had hardly discussed it before, but it was true. Even when they were separated, they had both had dreams about walking in the shadow of a mountain over a desert that was sand and rocks on one side and green with life on the other. They had even dreamt about their playful dark-haired child. Jacob thought about the huge oranges that came from Palestine. He thought about how much it meant to him to lead men into battle in a noble cause. *God gave me the ability to teach men how to fight for their freedom and to lead them successfully into battle. Does he now want me to go to Palestine? If not, why instill within me the desire?*

“Yes,” he whispered in Rachael’s ear. “Let’s go to Palestine and help to create a new homeland for the Jews. We can raise a family there. Rachael, they will be free Jews. We can build a new nation so that there will always be a safe place for Jews. What better use can we make of our lives than to create a nation where every Jew is welcome and where they will forever be free from tyranny? From the ashes of our people, let us help to create the rebirth of the nation of Israel.”

They sat content under the huge oak tree near their barracks and held hands as the sun set before them. It was a glorious summer sunset. The clouds turned into vibrant shades of orange, pink and purple, as shafts of golden sunlight bathed

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the landscape. And, despite the torture and death of their experience in the Holocaust, they felt satisfied. Instead of anger, their thoughts returned to the strange mountainside and their rambunctious dark-haired son who was yet to be born. They would gladly turn the barren desert into a paradise. They would happily fight to protect the land. It was the soil that God gave to the Jewish people so many lifetimes ago. And, in this new Holy Land, all Jews would be welcomed as free and equal citizens. It was, after all, the place that God had promised to the Jews when Moses led them from Egypt. But, despite all that awaited them in the future, Jacob would never forget the bravery of the First Brigade of the Fighters of Israel.

