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ILLUMINATIONS

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ILLUMINATIONS

by

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THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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***Illuminations* a Novel about Family**

The Context of the Novel

How does a family survive persecution and overwhelming violence? How do we define family? Is it the collection of people who live in a house together? Is it people related through blood and marriage? Is it a whole community? *Illuminations* is an exploration of family survival. I wanted to explore the possibility of surviving that violence with the most important elements of family and faith intact. Would families cling together, celebrate with one another? Mourn with one another? Would they cling to faith or turn away from God.

Part of my curiosity and exploration is certainly born of my own experiences. I did not grow up with much in terms of blood family. A term I came to appreciate much later was found family. I also wonder sometimes if family stories might deepen my connection to my family, but I grew up in a set of circumstances where I know very little about them. My mother and father were drug addicted alcoholics. They were physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive toward me during childhood. During their addiction, they in large part isolated us from our extended families, and I was never able to interact with them with the same ease and care I observe in other families. My mother passed away at 47, my father at 64. My grandparents all passed very early in my life. Due to the circumstances, I was never close to my parent's brothers, both only had brothers, so I have almost no family history. I know almost nothing about my ancestor's beliefs, passions, how they handled adversity, or what triumphs they had. And the small bits of information about my family's past I gained from my parents may or may not be accurate. After my father's death, I spoke with his brother about some of the things my

father told me. He denied them all. It was like having the few things my father gave me ripped away from me. I have nothing that connects me to my past.

Over time, I found faith. I found family in the Soldiers I served with. I found family in my marriage and children. But my story is boring and patchy, my memories of childhood are incomplete. A common trauma response is to lose chunks of memory. They resurface in dreams sometimes, but mostly it is a big blank slate with memories of only a few of the more brutal points. I am an only child, so I cannot even talk about it with a sibling. It would be a disjointed story with no real continuity. I let go of the idea of writing my own story long ago. One day I may attempt a series of short stories, I have written one or two, but how mundane? How many women write about their own trauma, their own childhood abuse? Their own victimization and rape? And frankly it can get a bit sentimental and sappy. I have moved on. Healed, so to speak. And besides, there is always someone with a worse story, worse abuse, and really, when telling my own stories, I have no flair for the dramatic. But, my own upbringing, and really my own trauma response, made me curious about how other people, people with a tight-knit family unit, with a deep and rich family history would face that trauma and violence. Though my own story may have helped me conceive of this story, the story is not mine.

At the heart of this novel is a story that grew slowly in my mind. Eventually that story grew into a proportion that demanded that I release the characters and their story onto paper. There were several points along the way that made a mark in my mind as the story began to develop. I think this novel developed when I began to realize how some of the things that interested me could fit together in a cohesive story. In this story I explored strong family bonds, with a shared history and awareness of the past. I also

explored the concept of found family and community. The selflessness humankind can display to keep children, our very future, alive to carry on our legacy. I explored the idea of being prepared to face violence, being aware of mounting violence in the world, and making a plan to face it. Does a tight knit family unit help? I didn't know. Perhaps I still don't, but I like to think it does.

Anyone who has known me for any length of time knows I am into hard rock music. Metallica, Megadeth, and Iron Maiden would be my idea of a perfect concert. The music can convey such deep emotion. Often the lyrics are meaningful in ways not often found in other types of music. It was this love of hard rock that brought me face to face with the idea of the holocaust again. I was driving to work, when the melodic voice of David Draiman, the lead singer of Disturbed, came across my radio. The radio station was playing a podcast he participated in. He was talking about Disturbed's song "Never Again." The song was about the Holocaust, and Holocaust Denial. He told a story about his grandmother. She survived Auschwitz due to the determination of her elders. As a child she was placed in line to enter the gas chambers three times. The adults around his grandmother allowed her to crawl to the back of the line between their legs, the gas chambers full before she could be placed in them (Von Schnurbein). The adults around her knew they were going to die, it was a possibility that one more body before them could prolong their lives, but still they chose to allow the child a chance to live. I like to think they knew a child could carry on their legacy, tell their stories. Even though they faced death, they could live on through her, even if that was the only story she ever told. It says something about the culture of World War II Jewish people in the worst possible

circumstances. It is inspiring, and a testament to how the community cared for their own.

But it got me thinking about the holocaust. I wondered about the determination of these people. I thought they must not have known prior to going to the concentration camps what awaited them. I thought about how it would be difficult to keep the death camps a secret. His interview and that song were linked in my head, so that every time I heard “Never Again” I thought about his grandmother’s story. I only knew that snippet, so I wondered, how did she get there? What happened after the camp was liberated? It planted a seed, a connection that would to be a part of Illuminations years later.

The seed of David Draiman’s story sprouted as I watched a documentary on Treblinka. It was like the documentary added fertilizer, sunshine, and water to that seed. The documentary revealed there were two camps named Treblinka. Treblinka I was a work camp. Certainly, the people housed in that camp were subjected to horrendous, possibly deadly treatment. They were starved, killed if they got sick, or could not work. They were killed when they were no longer useful to the Germans and their war effort. We call the work the Jewish people did “forced Labor” but that is a euphemism for slavery. It should not have been a revelation to me, but it was. Language is so powerful that we tend to overlook the fact that Jewish slavery was alive and well in Europe in the 1930s. The conditions and treatment of the Jewish people in Treblinka I is terrible to contemplate, but the lesser-known Treblinka II is worse (*Treblinka Inside Hitler’s Secret Death Camp*).

Treblinka II was an extermination camp. I had never heard of this extermination camp, prior to seeing the documentary, I guess not many people had. In fact, in my

research I discovered the Germans razed the camp near the end of the war, trying to erase its existence. According to an article in *Live Science*, "...little physical evidence of this genocide remained. What was known about Treblinka came from Nazi confessions and the eyewitness descriptions of very few survivors..." (Pappas). The Germans tried so hard to hide Treblinka during the war, that they told the Jews they were moving to eastern Europe, to better living conditions. The Jewish willingly boarded a train, complete with ticket stations. Upon arrival, the Jews were greeted with an orchestra, and asked to split into men and women, and undress for delousing. Without hesitation, they walked into the showers, the first step to a better life they were promised. Instead of a better life, they were given death, gassed in the showers. Using these methods, The Germans were able to quietly exterminate thousands of Jewish people. Within the scant sixteen months, Treblinka became the second most prolific killing ground for the European Jewish people (Pappas). The only extermination camp to exceed Treblinka's number of murdered people was Auschwitz.

This documentary, and my follow up reading made me wonder, did the Jewish have any idea that Hitler's Final Solution was bearing down on them? Did they have any idea when they walked into the showers what was about to happen? Were they just tired of fighting, and what did that fighting look like? I realized fighting could be as simple and quiet as allowing David Draiman's grandmother to crawl to the back of the line. I began to connect the strong family relationships and community ties to fighting against extermination. The idea that if any of us survive, all of us survive began to shine through.

That still left the question of what did they know? When the Germans crammed the Jewish into the ghettos? Was it a surprise when first the German Army and then the Polish Army started slaughtering the Jewish people? How could they believe that boarding the trains would lead to a better life? The more I contemplated it, the less I could believe that the entire German Army was able to keep their activities and the death camps a secret from the Jewish people. How could they? Or did they know what was going on? All of them I mean. I have a hard time believing the entire army was complicit. Did the message go out to the soldiers like a game of telephone, the message twisted along the path? Alternatively, was the message given, but not properly received? Certainly, reading Schindler's list, I found a passage that indicates sometimes the latter was sometimes true. Schindler, on a visit to one of his Jewish contacts, Stern, shared,

“Tomorrow it's going to start. Jozefa and Izaaka Streets are going to know all about it...When Oskar said 'tomorrow,' Stern presumed he was using the term not in the sense of December 4, but in the terms in which drunks and prophets always used it, as something that either would or damn well should happen soon,” (Keneally 56).

Still this was anecdotal evidence of a single instance. Was this singular, or was it more widespread? I was curious. The idea of a story was born. At the time I thought it might be a short story. There was a short story in the idea, but I realized as I wrote, the story was more about the message being lost. I wrote a short story about religious posts on social media, and the insistence on “Like and Share” for blessings from our Lord, the loss of the true message. But the seed for a story about the holocaust was still present.

About a year after watching the Treblinka documentary, I watched a documentary called *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus*. This documentary poses the idea that the suggested Egyptian timeline is incorrect. The documentary gave me some thoughts about the Exodus and led me to the book it was based on, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest*, by David Rohl. David Rohl is often dismissed by biblical scholars but uses his study of Egyptology and ancient history to lay out evidence that is difficult to ignore that suggests the accepted timeline of Egyptian history is incorrect, and there is archaeological evidence of the biblical book of Exodus. For example, there is a document called the Brooklyn Papyrus, transferring the ownership of slaves, that specifically names one of the two midwives named in Exodus. In his book, he goes into much greater detail about a possible alternate Egyptian timeline and gives more details about the Hebrew way of life. It details archaeological evidence for a key element of my story, the murder of the male Hebrew slave children. Specifically, Rohl refers to, "First, an anthropological analysis of the skeletal remains...shows more adult women were buried in the settlement than adult men. This could indicate that there was a disproportionately high female population at Avaras," (271) and in the next paragraph, "In the context of this same story it was discovered that there was a higher percentage of infant burials at Tell ed-Daba than is normally found at archaeological sites of the ancient world. Sixty-five per cent of all the burials were those of children under the age of eighteen months," (271)

Around this time, I also saw James Cameron's documentary, *The Exodus Decoded*. This documentary also presented an alternate timeline for the exodus. The documentary details important details about Hebrews in Egypt, allowing me to enrich

the descriptions I use in the novel. But more importantly, these two documentaries, and Rahl's book made me wonder about the slaughter of the male Hebrew children. I have a hard time believing Pharaoh was able to keep his plans to cull the children from the Hebrew, and I doubt it was a snap decision. In fact, the bible tells us he tried to have the midwives kill the male children as they were born. I also thought about how people in society would react to the news. Would they believe it? There was presumably nothing in their history to hint that they needed to pay attention. The Hebrew were slaves, and why would the Egyptians thin their work equipment? I could not see how it would be believable. That said, there are people who do believe every rumor they hear, those who wait for evidence, and those who don't believe even when shown clear evidence. Why would it be different with the Hebrew?

It was a week or so later, in a discussion with my husband about the current volatile political climate sparked by a couple of news articles reporting that some congressional leaders in our own country suggested some citizens needed to be placed in "re-education camps," and we wondered how long a step it was between re-education camps and Nazi Death camps. We talked about how people across the political spectrum like to use the term "Nazi" every time there is an idealistic disagreement, and the rise of antisemitism among elected government officials, and the cyclic nature of history. It was then that I connected the Exodus, the holocaust, and modern antisemitism, and I thought there might be a story in that idea, but I was unsure how to connect the ideas in an easy-to-follow format. My husband posed the idea of an oral tradition, beyond reading the exodus story, being passed down through a family possibly holding more weight than the exodus story as written. He talked about the

personal touch of a family history. He encouraged me to write a story about the idea and my novel was born.

Summary

I used the medium of an intergenerational historical novel that explores the role of oral traditions and memories in families, and their role in building family resilience in the face of overwhelming violence.

I chose to take a single-family centric view in the prologue of my novel to humanize the events of the story. We tend to read the stories of the exodus without really thinking about the humanity of the Hebrew affected by Pharaoh, possibly because the story is told in such a matter of fact, dry way, in language some find inaccessible. I don't believe I had ever given thought to how terrible a situation it was until I watched the movie *The Prince of Egypt*. The animated film is about the life of Moses from birth through the escape of the Hebrew by parting the red sea, and Pharaoh's army being drowned. It is viewed through the lens of family, Moses' mother setting him adrift in a basket, being adopted into the family of the Pharaoh, the family he leaves, finding a new family with his wife, and then facing his adoptive family to free his people. Viewing it from the lens of family presented an in-depth look at the emotional turmoil of Moses leaving the only family he had ever known; the heartbreak Moses would have felt with the final plague in particular. This view allowed the screenwriters to tap into the emotions of the viewers in a meaningful way.

Using this example, I decided that looking at the culling of the male children through the lens of a family that experienced it firsthand, instead of looking at a societal view would allow readers to connect with family in an interesting way. My hope was to

evoke connection and empathy in my reader for the family, to get them invested in the story. Setting the story approximately thirty years prior to the Exodus, the story centers on a family of Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The family consists of a father, Abihu, his pregnant wife Jabez, their daughter, Bithan, and son, Azazer. Rumors are circulating about Pharaoh's plan to cull male children, causing anxiety in the family. The family must consider the validity of the rumors, the likelihood of a male child, and the possible consequences. They must choose to either stay, and deal with the possible consequences, or risk leaving their community to find a safe place for the baby they are expecting. The family does not leave, and they lose their male child when he is born to Pharaoh's plan. Their heartbreak becomes a story, and oral tradition that is passed down from one generation to the next, as both family history and warning to future generations to be aware.

The main section of my novel takes place in Poland, starting just prior to World War II, and finishing just after the War. To understand the different ways that the Jewish people survived the war, I started watching survivor stories. There are several of them on YouTube. The USC Shoah Foundation did several of the ones I watched. These interviews, these testimonials, the experiences of the Jews who lived through this experience, told in their own voices, were incredibly moving, and a testament to the strengths and experiences of these incredibly strong people. I tried to convey the terror, horror, joy, and faith detailed in the survivor stories. The terror in particular was important to convey, because it should underlie the entire story. In the words of Tova Freidman, "This psychology of terror is the way you destroy a people," (EdisonBOE 11:29). I also read Holocaust survival books. Almost nothing in my novel is not inspired

by either these interviews, or the holocaust survival stories I read. In fact, after a pivotal moment in the story, the main protagonist, Abram calls out, “They are killing our future, and our past, killing the old and the young,” Abram said. “Who are we without a future or a past?” He sighed, “We are nobody, nothing. We are being exterminated, ruthlessly, completely,” (Thoman, 91). This exclamation was inspired by Tova Friedman's declaration, “A few days earlier, their parents had dug the graves. So, my father, first time dug the graves for his parents, and now he dug the graves, supposedly of his child, but I luckily wasn't there, for children. You see how they used us? At each step, at each step of the way they used us to kill our own people, our children, our parents. That's good psychology, right? Those people don't want to live anymore. You break, that's how you break them. That's how you break people,” (EdisonBOE 51:21).

The atrocities of the German and Polish Armies are all based on real events. The marriages that take place are inspired by the story of a survivor's wedding in the Ghetto (*Arriving in Auschwitz | Holocaust Survivor Ellen Brandt*). Possibly the biggest idea these survivor stories made very clear to me is that a tight knit family and faith are a big part of surviving. Tova Friedman makes this very clear when in her interview she shares, “How do you destroy an entire nation? You take away the elderly, the grandparents. You take away that which makes a family stable,” (EdisonBOE 11:40). It was no guarantee of survival, but it certainly played a large role in several of the stories I listened to and read. I tucked that bit of information away, in a dark corner of my mind.

Form

The idea of a family who was vigilant because of their family history, passed down via oral tradition, hearing rumors and choosing to be prepared to resist was very

appealing, but how to tell the story? At first, I thought the story would be a family who, though they were forewarned, did not escape quickly enough, and were trapped inside a ghetto, trying to survive, and escape. I envisioned a daring escape, and a run for safety. It had the potential to be a heroic story, but it has been done many times, by authors better than me, and by people who lived it. Inspiration struck when I read the book *The Sisters of Auschwitz The true story of two Jewish sisters' resistance in the heart of Nazi territory*. The book detailed sisters who refused a J on their ID at the start of the holocaust. They ran from Amsterdam, and eventually found, and lived in a cabin in the woods called The High nest. The house was not easy to get to, and in the High Nest, they were able to hide other Jews. The book describes a network of people who “lose” their identification, donating it to Jewish people. Eventually the sisters are captured and taken to Auschwitz, interestingly on the same train as Anne Frank’s family, but the sisters survive the death camp (Iperen and Zwart). Stories of Auschwitz also abound, so I knew I did not want to write about that. I thought it might be interesting to look at the idea of hiding in plain sight. With forewarning, the Jewish family in my novel took gentile names, and took action to save their house, their family, and as many people in their community as they could. I wanted to include a range of emotions, so I included some incidents based on atrocities I read about, or listened to, joyful weddings, hard situations, and terrible decisions. I also wanted to include a redemption arc for a German soldier, because I refuse to believe that every German soldier was on board with this mass execution. I wanted the characters, and the family relationships to feel real to my readers.

Genre

Using the mechanism of historical fiction allows me to explore the themes of perseverance in the face of violence, and the ties of family against the backdrop of two well-documented historical events. Reading Jean M Auel's *Clan of the Cave Bear* made me realize that I could use the archaeological record presented in the two documentaries about the Exodus to make some inferences about society and family structures. Her dedication to the research involved in describing activities like flint knapping made me realize I could do enough research to make both my settings and situations in the Exodus and the holocaust believable.

Using the repeated history of the violence and death for the Hebrew and the Jewish people in the Exodus and the Holocaust allows me to shine a light on modern antisemitism, and the deadly consequences of hatred overall, while humanizing the experiences by looking through the lens of a fictional family. Especially now, in light of the new violent conflict between Hamas and Israel, I see the potential for another mass slaughter. Perhaps being aware, we can avoid the extermination based on religion or race. While the bible simply tells us the reason for culling the male children was that the Hebrew grew too numerous, and the Pharaoh wanted to avoid a revolt, we have much more context for the holocaust. Reading *Facing History and Ourselves, Holocaust and Human Behavior*, I found several frightening parallels between historical beliefs the Germans held, for example, blaming the Jews for terrible inflation and income inequality, and some of the sentiments voiced in the current day United States. Those beliefs allowed the German people to dehumanize the Jewish. That dehumanization allowed to the populace being complicit in the Jewish extermination through "The Final

Solution.” I think that there was at least a surface level belief that exterminating the Jewish would in some way restore fairness and balance to the world. The parallel to modern thought is stunning. When you consider there are currently politicians who have advocated for the round up and “re-education” of citizens with a different political belief, it is easy to see our society heading down the same dehumanization track. Shining a light on the radical beliefs of the German during the holocaust, perhaps readers will reflect on their own beliefs and how unchecked, they can lead to terrible outcomes.

Structure

I used a three-part story in order to explore the different instances of antisemitism. The violence differs from one generation to the next but is present. The people who perpetrated the violence are just people, following orders, some with more glee than others. In both the Exodus and the Holocaust, the slaughter is initiated by a man in power convinced they were doing a net positive for their communities.

Writing the prologue I built tension throughout the story. I used conversations between characters, revealing their fears and concerns, highlighting the rumors about the slaughter of the children to heighten the emotions my reader should feel. There is no release of tension, it crescendos with the loss of a newborn child, and then relaxes as the reader realizes the family is leaving, so they never have to face that again. The prologue is presented as a story Abram tells his grandchildren before the start of the war, reinforcing the idea of oral history.

In the main story, I punctuated scenes of terror and atrocity with scenes of joy, and everyday living. I worked to introduce a man with deep faith, thankful for all the blessings in his life. He and his wife form a formidable team that faces the world, and

the war together. They confide in one another, lift one another up, and comfort one another in the face of horror. Part of this idea came from the interview with Tova Friedman, when she said living in the ghetto was a good thing, “So this was the ghetto, and this was good. You know why this was good? because my mother and father were together. We were a family. We were live with about ten other families, but it didn’t matter, we lived, we we we had structure still,”(1338). This statement clearly illuminated the importance of the family structure during the Holocaust.

The Epilogue is a much shorter section. There is no central leader who leads an antisemitic slaughter of the Jewish people, and no move to eliminate a large portion of Jewish People. My original idea was to use the granddaughter of Abram and Malka, Names Jabez after the distance relative from their oral history being asked by her granddaughter to tell the stories of Jabez and of Abram and Malka. After the stories are told and the girl is in bed, Jabez will have a discussion with her husband about recent antisemitism. My original concept was to cover the page in headlines about antisemitism, but with recent events, I think a discussion about Hamas’s attack on Israel, and the follow-on pro-Hamas protests and demonstrations across the United States may be a more appropriate discussion. This will be the third historic cycle of violence against the Jewish people highlighted in my novel.

This three-part structure allows me to highlight the cyclic nature of history and highlight the beginnings of antisemitic violence again. Awareness is key to prevention. I want to leave my readers with a lasting impression. When I think of a lasting impression, I think of the concise use of language found in Arthur C Clark’s short story Quarantine. In a half a page, beginning with a brief description, “Earth’s flaming debris still filled half

the sky..." followed by a brief conversation between 2 computers, during which they talk about five other computers becoming infected, and as a result becoming obsessed by a problem they found unsolvable. The final sentence reveals the problem is chess, as one computer enumerates the six operators of the problem, "Here they are: King, Queen, Bishop, Knight, Rook, Pawn," (Clark). This story possesses a narrative that echos through my mind sometimes, just causing me to reflect on and marvel at his use of language. In that vein, and in order to leave a lasting impression, I think a nice finish to the epilogue would be a bible verse, something like Numbers 24:9, "The Nation is like a mighty lion; when it is sleeping, no one dares wake it. Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses Israel will be cursed." I think, like I used King James in the Prologue, I would use the Good News Translation in the Epilogue, to demonstrate the passage of time, and to reflect a more modern speech pattern.

Voice / Narration

I used a third person omniscient narration style throughout the story to deepen the story. This narration style allows readers to get a peek into the heads but follow the story primarily from a single point of view during each section of the story. The vastly different circumstances of the three different generations of the family in the story allow me to explore the longevity and effects of oral history.

The prologue, which takes place prior to the Exodus, primarily uses the point of view of Jabez, whose name means sorrowful. Using her point of view allowed me to explore the softer, more emotional side of the story. And we experience the loss of her newborn son moments after birth, which I think lends to the emotional gravitas of the situation.

We also see the viewpoint of the Pharaoh, who by virtue of considering the murder of all the newborn male children is an evil person. But he, like many who are evil, does not view himself as evil, searching for what he feels is the most humane way to remove and dispose of the children.

The main body of the story is told from the point of view of Abram, whose name means exalted father, the head of the family centered in this section. Abram is a loving, caring man, who will do anything to ensure his family survives, and to preserve the legacy of the Jewish people. He makes hard decisions, and weeps over the consequences. He is the strong, loving person his family needs. He fights the extermination of his people in the only way he can, and though his legacy is small, he makes a difference. Abram prays often. I found this to be realistic, as several of the holocaust survival stories mention praying and strong, steadfast faith. Even in the Diary of Anne Frank, she finished her 31 March 1944 entry with the phrase, "God has not left me alone and will not leave me alone," (Frank).

We also see parts of the situation from the point of view of Hany, a German Soldier. Hany, like many Germans of the time, completely buys into the dehumanization of the Jewish people but has no taste for violence. Over time, watching the reactions of the Jewish people he has a hand in slaughtering, he realized they are not demons responsible for all the ills of the world, but humans, just like his family. He realized that none of the people they are killing has anything to do with his family's circumstances. He may, or may not realize the Abram's family are Jewish, but he does realize they have compassion, and begins to help smuggle children to the family to hide.

Characters

The characters in my novel are works of fiction, but I worked to make them realistic, believable, and relatable. Their interactions as a family are somewhat based on my experiences with my family. Some of their traits echo characters in other books that I admire.

Writing Jabez, I thought about *Gone with the Wind* a lot. I thought about the character Melanie Hamilton. She was a woman who was kind and gentle through living in luxury, losing everything during a war, living through poverty and loss, but never losing her sweet and gentle nature. She was sweet and loving with everyone around her, but had a core of steel and would do anything to preserve her family. Once scene that springs to mind takes place at Scarlett O'Hara's home Tara, when Melanie is in bed, exceedingly weak after a difficult childbirth that almost claimed her life. An Army deserter has come into her house and is robbing the family of what little they possess. Scarlett shoots the man, and Melanie, who hears it, comes to Scarlett's aid,

“...Scarlett looked up and saw Melanie at the top of the stairs, clad only in the ragged chemise which served as her nightgown, her weak arm weighed down with Charles' saber...She saw in a flash of clarity untouched by any petty emotion that beneath the dovelike eyes of Melanie there was a thin flashing blade of unbreakable steel, felt too that there were banners and bugles of courage Melanie's quiet blood,” (Mitchell Loc 7355 - 7363).

She never lost faith that her husband would come home from the war one day and gave her life trying to bring a child into the world. I wanted Jabez to be true and protective of her family, trusting her husband and to face adversity.

Writing Abram, I thought about Robert Jordan's *The Eye of the World*. In particular, I thought about the relationship between the hero, Rand, and his father Tam. Tam was an ideal father, able to fight boldly to ensure his son's survival, and able to let his son go to save his life. Rand and Tam are enjoying a quiet night by the fire when shadow spawn break into their house, and Tam springs into action,

"Even as the kettle struck, Tam's sword flashed. The roar abruptly became a gurgle, and the huge shape toppled back. Before it finished falling another was trying to claw its way past. Rand glimpsed a misshapen head topped by spike like horns before Tam struck again, and two huge bodies blocked the door," (Jordan 81).

Tam shouts for his son to get out. He says he will join Rand but sustains a life threatening injury to assure his son's safety. Then, when it is clear the attack was aimed at killing Rand and two of his friends, Tam allows his son to leave their village to seek safety. This relationship and Tam's character served as a model for Abram. It allowed me to think critically about how he would react to different situations and make hard, but noble choices. I wanted Abram to read as a quiet hero.

In terms of family dynamics, my own nuclear family growing up was a poor example. I was an only child in an abusive house. I had to draw on what I see from my own children, my husband's relationship with his mother, and my cousins' relationships with one another and their parents. These were warm, loving relationships with support in hard situations. Even so, there were fights among the siblings, misunderstandings, and instances of running away. I patterned the relationships among the siblings in the family from these life lessons.

The epilogue characters are not as well fleshed out. This section may end up cut from the novel but is only meant to make a point. The point is served without characters of great depth.

Setting

Writing the setting, I thought a lot about *The Stand* by Stephen King. His post-apocalyptic setting was somewhat vague and allowed me to think about the story he wove and the characters he brought to life. His setting was somewhat like a sketch that allowed me to understand where everyone was without thinking too hard about it. I wanted to replicate that sort of setting in my story. I chose a nondescript setting in Egypt and an unnamed fictitious ghetto in Poland for a couple of reasons. First, though the backdrop of the holocaust is well documented, most of the ghettos in the survivor stories I read and listened to did not have names. I am unsure if that is because the interviewees did not mention them, or if it was because they were not named. Either way I thought it could add somewhat to the ability for a reader to connect with my characters, to empathize with their plight, and serve to further emphasize the dehumanization of the Jewish people.

I also thought the smaller ghettos, prior to consolidation, may have been easier to slip into, or out of, and have less concise record keeping. This supposed set of circumstances allowed the idea of hiding in plain sight to be more believable. It also allows the imagination of the reader to fill in some of the vagaries built into the settings. Naming a specific town converted into a ghetto may cause issues in terms of layout and visualization.

In Egypt, keeping the setting somewhat vague also allows for visualization. I used the alternate timeline suggested by the documentaries I watched, which may be a slightly controversial decision, but I think offers an interesting viewpoint for the story. What is interesting about this decision is that research on the pharaoh and time period will lead readers to archaeological evidence that the Exodus was an actual occurrence.

Conclusion

Writing this novel gave me a chance to explore a family life I never experienced. It also allowed me to explore different ways to face violence and come out unbroken. I experienced violence growing up but felt very isolated and alone doing so, and though I have healed, I did not come out unscathed. I wanted to explore how a solid family connection would allow a person to escape without being a victim.

I attempted to place my novel within the tradition of existing holocaust literature. I attempted to show an adherence to faith such as was found in the *Diary of Anne Frank*, the possibility of kindness and sympathy such as can be found in *Schindler's List*, and an example of the quiet resistance such as I found in *The Sisters of Auschwitz*. The hope I have is to both shed light on the situations that occur currently in our world, and perhaps keep them from advancing to holocaust proportions.

Some small part of me also hopes that it can heal some antisemitic pain. In the Army as a Soldier, I experienced sexual assault. I realized one of the best ways to heal was to talk about those events. They lost their grip on me as I talked about them. Eventually I became a victim's advocate, and I spoke with other women about their stories, and helped them get the care they needed to heal. Talking to me eased their pain, just as talking had eased mine. I could not help all the Soldiers who had been

assaulted, but I could help some. Talking with my husband about wishing I could help more, and he told me a story from his own family, the starfish on the shore. If reading my novel helps even one person avoid persecution, appreciate their family ties, or want to know more about their past, I feel I have made a difference, not to a wide audience perhaps, but to that one. Just like the starfish.

Abstract

Illumination is the multi-generational story of a Jewish family, and their oral traditions. The story will trace the family from just before the biblical exodus, through the holocaust, and follow them to modern day America. The family will face antisemitism at each place in history along the way, losing a child to the pharaoh's cruel decree to slay the male children of the Hebrew slaves, narrowly escaping a death camp in the holocaust, and finally facing growing anti-Jewish hate in America. In the last act of the story, the family will be faced with the question, if you are in the country that affords its citizens the greatest freedom known to modern man, where can you go to avoid the hate?

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Prologue

And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives. Of which the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah:

And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

-Exodus 1 15-17

And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

-Exodus 1 22

Jabez gazed out her door, absently rubbing her hands over her gently swelling belly. The sky was painted in the brilliant purples, pinks, and oranges of sunset. She pushed the curled chestnut wisps of hair that had escaped her braid back from her forehead, out of the sweat covering her face. She glanced up at the window high in the mud brick wall, mentally gauging how much longer it would be until the overseers let Abihu leave the mud pits and come home. She turned to the small fire in her raised hearth, stirring the pot of stew hanging above it. "Bithian, Azazer, your father will be home soon. Bring some fresh water please." She knew her husband would be thirsty; the overseers did not allow the slaves to drink near enough water.

Jabez looked at her children and sighed, she knew that by her daughter's next birthday, Bithian would be required in the fields to cut straw for the bricks the Hebrew

were required to make. When she had seen 14 summers, she would join the brick makers. The hard work of mixing the straw with the mud could build strong hard muscles in her daughter if she got enough to eat. More often though the underfeeding of the slaves meant that the hard work made them thinner, their bones more easily broken. Boys began those chores even earlier. She sighed, dashing away tears of love and frustration, there was nothing she could do to alleviate the work her children would be expected to perform. Jabez slid her hands over her swelling belly again, she had only been excused from the field because of her advanced pregnancy. Birthing more slaves meant more hands making bricks eventually.

“Ok Mamma,” Bithian replied. She was a girl in the awkward stage of long thin limbs, and seemed to be all knees and elbows, who had seen just over ten summers. Her hair was as curly, wild, and thick as her mother’s, but with the darker tones of her father’s hair, quite striking with her green eyes and sun-dark skin. She would grow into a beautiful woman one day, her mother mused, once the rest of her caught up with those long limbs and she filled out a bit. If she filled out; malnutrition made that uncertain. But her children were happy today. Bithian grabbed the thick clay pitcher off the table, poking her brother, “You can work the crank to pull up the water today.” She giggled.

“I am getting really strong! I can do it,” Azazer responded with the eager helper’s attitude only young children can muster. Azazer was five.

Jabez gave the stew another stir. She shook her head ruefully; stew was a bit overstated for the thin broth with a few small chunks of goat meat and vegetables on the edge of rot. She glanced up at the window gauging the setting sun once more and took a seat in front of her loom. The baby kicked and rolled over. He or she would be here in

a scant couple of months, and the baby would need clothes and blankets that would not make themselves. Perhaps Bithian was approaching an age when she could begin spinning and weaving, Jabez mused, her fingers doing the accustomed work with little thought. If she did particularly well at spinning and weaving, she may escape the mud pits; good cloth was always necessary.

Slaves who were adept at making cloth sometimes worked in the palace weaving for the Pharaoh's servants and families. Making cloth was about dexterity, deft hands, and a good eye for patterns. The girl already had quick, clever fingers quite skilled at braiding. Bithian had been able to weave a watertight bowl for over a year now.

"I am home, Wife!" Abihu announced walking over the threshold. Even after all these years, Jabez' heart skipped a beat at the warm sound of his voice, "It went a little long today, the builders wanted to finish a wall, and we made bricks until they were done. I stopped to wash in the river. It was some hard work, and I am a hungry man!" He chuckled, his grin stretching across his face, the lines at the corners of his dark brown eyes crinkling with joy. His hair was near black in color, long, wavy and held back by a simple leather cord tied around its girth. Abihu always put the best face possible on their lives. Jabez could almost believe they were not slaves when he spoke. She smiled even as she shook her head in negation.

"I am glad you washed already." She was thankful he did not smell like stale sweat and stagnant water. "The children went to get fresh water for drinking, but I did not send them for enough to bathe this time. I know it is hot out there, you must be thirsty." She glanced up from her weaving, and her fingers stilled in their work, she met her husband's eyes, "Have you heard the rumors?"

“What rumors my love?” he said as he pulled his shirt off over his head placing it in the basket to be washed.

“Well, you know how Boaz is friendly with a few of the foremen?”

“Of course! We all know, it works to our advantage to be on his crew because of it!” He grabbed a fresh shirt, pausing to look at his wife, “Sometimes we get a couple of extra water breaks when it is hot, and even extra food while we work from them. It isn’t great food, but it is something!” He finished donning the shirt. “I am thankful when they show that extra bit of compassion.”

“Well, Anaiah was telling me that he came home last week and started talking about plans to leave. Boaz told her he overheard Ptah and Thoth talking about some sort of nasty plan Pharaoh has, a way to reduce the slave population. She said when they realized he was listening, they quickly changed the subject. Whatever it was he heard made him afraid for their baby. In fact, Anaiah seemed to think he was afraid for their whole family. Can Pharaoh possibly believe there are too many of us?”

“Well, I will keep my ear to the ground, but I cannot imagine Pharaoh doing anything too drastic! How will he build his great cities and monuments without our bricks? We know from God’s promises that we will be delivered from our servitude.” He frowned, considering, “But, there are lots of rumors about him being much more cruel than his father was.” He sighed, “We must keep our faith. And we can always pray.” He reached out and slid his hands over the baby inside her, cupping the rounded mound of flesh tenderly,” besides, do you think I will allow anything to happen to this sweet baby?” he cradled the underside in his hands lovingly.

“The baby always calms down when it hears your voice,” Jabez remarked, placing her hands over his. “Perhaps you’re right, maybe,” she cut off as her thought was interrupted by their two children barreling into the room carrying a clay pitcher with water, “set that on the table before you greet your father,” she laughed. Her family was together again, that was all that mattered. And besides, perhaps her husband was right, there was nothing to worry about, well, at least not about Pharaoh’s supposed plans anyway, she thought eyeing her husband’s clothes. She would have to wash his shirt very thoroughly in the river tomorrow if she was going to dislodge all that mud. She began to ladle soup into their bowls.

~~~

The next morning Jabez sent her children to play with Boaz and Anaiah’s children, Enice, and Ruth, as she gathered the laundry for washing.

“Behave, you know Anaiah will have her baby soon, so help out if you can,” Jabez pushed her children out the door with a quick kiss. She walked to the river with her load of clothes tucked under her arm, waving a greeting to her neighbor, already at the wash rock.

“Did you hear?” Beasmath said, beating a shirt against the washing rock at the edge of the river. The rock helped remove the stubborn mud from their clothes once they had soaked a bit.

“Hear what?” Jabez responded, as she placed some clothing into the soaking pool to loosen the dirt, awaiting her turn at the beating rock.

“Anaiah’s family is making plans to leave, before she has the baby!”



“That is crazy, the baby will be here very soon, and they cannot carry enough water and food to get anywhere they can live free and well. Where will they go?” Jabez plucked two smooth rocks from the shore. Rubbing the material between them would help soften and loosen the mud and knock off some of the straw, making the mud and sweat in the clothes easier to remove.

“I’ve heard talk about an oasis in the east, but I hear it is a long, hard, hot journey. I really can’t say, but with the rumors going around about Pharaoh and his new ideas about thinning out our numbers, I wouldn’t be surprised if everyone who was pregnant left,” Beasmath’s hands slid some fabric down the beating rock as she shot a sideways look at Jabez’s thickened waistline.

“I heard he had a plan to reduce our numbers, which seems evil and malicious, but do you really think he would reduce our ability to make bricks? That is what thinning us out would do. I cannot believe he would, it makes no sense.” Jabez paused to pull a particularly stubborn bit of straw out of Abihu’s shirt and tossed it aside.

“I heard he was working on a plan to cull the youngest boys. They would not be of use in the field for some time, and it would reduce our numbers.” Beasmath grunted as some water splashed her in the face, wiping it away she continued,” The girls could still work in the brick pits. Weaker slaves might be attractive to Pharaoh. I am sure Pharaoh thinks it would quell us.”

“Can you imagine how we would turn against him if he did?” she returned to loosening the grime on her family’s clothing.

“Oh, I don’t think he cares. He has all the power, and we are slaves. The overseers are always nearby with whips that most are happy to use. Even the friendly

ones don't hesitate if they think we need to be beaten. Need to question us? they beat us, don't make your brick quota? they beat us, do anything they dislike? they beat us." She sighed and continued, "sometimes I think I will go to my grave feeling the whips of the overseers. Leaving is risky for Anaiah and her family, but staying might be just as bad. Possibly worse. I don't think Boaz and Anaiah would leave if they didn't believe the rumors. His information may be good."

"I don't know if I believe it. I mean, what will they do? Rip children from their mother's arms and gut them in front of families?" She stirred the clothes with a long stick. "Even if Pharaoh ordered it, I don't think the overseers could be that cruel."

Beasmath grunted as she slid cloth down the rough portion of the rock. "It would be no more difficult than gutting a goat, I think. They don't really see us as human, just a herd, our value in the work we do. It is easy enough to cull the herd. I heard the Pharaoh asked the midwives to kill boys at birth, and the toddlers will be thrown into the river."

Jabez laughed, "Shiphrah and Puah fear the lord too much to kill babies as they are born, they are here to aid the creation of life in the moment of birth. I cannot believe they would kill the children. The toddlers I think would know enough to walk out of the river, and children younger, well, their mothers would simply go get them. It is not so deep they would sink low enough to drown! I think that is a fable."

Beasmath shook her head. "When I say they will throw the children into the river, I don't mean here. The overseers know we are here frequently, that we use this area of the river. Pharaoh's men will go to the deep part with the steep sides."

“That area is infested with crocodiles! Who is mean enough to allow children to be eaten?” she shook her head. “Besides, that would deny us the ability to bury our children, deny their re-incarnations if their bodies are consumed. Nope, I don't believe it.” Jabez shook her head in negation even as she felt a chill close in around her heart.

“I don't think the Egyptians really care about our beliefs. Are you concerned about the goat's soul when you bleed one for meat? And the Egyptians don't think we do right by our dead anyway. We don't mummify them or preserve their bodies. They don't understand Hebrew tradition. Why would they respect them?” Beasmath collected her clothing in a basket, “Your turn, I have to go spread these in the sun to dry.” She looked Jabez directly in the eyes, lowering her voice she added, “Think about leaving for the sake of your baby Jabez. I don't want to see what that would do to you and your family.” As she walked away, Jabez frowned, looking down, sliding her hands over the baby. No one could be that cruel, she thought. The baby within her belly stirred, rolled over and was still once more.

~~~

That night, Abihu stretched in the bed they shared, rolled over, and cuddled his wife from behind, reaching over her and resting his hand possessively on Jabez's belly, feeling their baby move beneath the tight stretched skin. “Boaz, damn fool,” he yawned, “he talked all day about his family's great escape. He talked about the route he would take, where they would go, and the like. I tried to explain that an expedition like that would be dangerous for his wife. Traveling this late in her pregnancy would be very hard for Anaiah, but he did not listen. He is dead set on leaving before the baby comes.”

“Beasmath was talking about Boaz’s plan as well. If Boaz and Anaiah keep talking to so many people about it, the overseers are sure to find out. Secrets have a way of spreading beyond their intended audience when they grow too big. Beasmath seemed to think we should think about leaving too, but if the overseers find out, it is likely they will kill Boaz for trying to leave. I don’t want that for our family, and I can’t imagine traveling as pregnant as she is! And who will deliver the baby? I doubt that Boaz knows what to do. But I cannot help but think, what if he is right?” Jabez’s voice trembled a bit as the words gushed out of her.

“Oh honey, it must be the heat and the pregnancy getting to you. I am telling you; I don’t think we have anything to worry about. Besides, where would we go? There is nowhere safe for us to go, nowhere safe we can reach in your condition without putting you in danger.”

“But we are slaves, property, we live and die at the whim of the pharaoh. What if he really is planning to kill the children? If the rumors are true, Azazer should be safe, but this baby, if it is a boy? What if the midwives really are killing male babies? What if that really is what Pharaoh wants?”

“I don’t think the overseers would go along so easily, my wife. They get attached to us. Just earlier today Thoth was asking when we could expect the little one. He seemed so excited. I don’t see him as looking forward to killing babies, do you?” Abihu turned aside and blew out the lamp. “Everything will be ok Jabez, you will see,” he curled protectively around his wife pulling her tight against him.

~~~

“Mamma?”

“Yes Baby?” Jabez braced herself for a barrage of questions. Bithian was ten at that age.

“What happens to us when we die?”

“Well, we believe in one true God. Our purpose is to fear, love and exalt the Lord our God, to praise and worship Him. Your father and I believe that when we die, our souls have a time of purification, and are then reborn into the world, so that we may continue to bring glory to our God. But different people believe in different things. The masters here believe that the pharaoh is a god, and that is why he has the great temples built to honor him. They think they can only go on to the afterlife if their bodies are preserved. That is why they remove their organs and put the bodies in salt to dry them out. They have many gods, but the one in charge of the afterlife is called Anubis. They believe he guides the souls of the departed smoothly to the afterlife. Your father and I don’t believe that though. Anubis will not come for us. But this is a heavy topic for such a little girl, what makes you ask?”

“I’m afraid to die.” Her eyes, hazel in the light glistened with tears as she affected bravery, “I thought knowing what happens might make me feel better.”

“Why are you thinking about dying?” Jabez took a deep breath, she hoped she was wrong about the cause of her daughter’s concerns. “That won’t happen for a long, long time!”

“Everyone is saying Pharaoh is going to kill all the kids. I will hide, but what if he finds me anyway? What if he kills me? I heard he is going to chop our heads off, what if it hurts?” Bithian began to weep.

“Oh baby,” Jabez gathered her daughter in her arms, she sucked in a deep breath, wishing silently that Boaz would shut up. The rumors had gone too far when it started affecting the children like this. “I don’t think that is going to happen. How would Pharaoh build his great monuments without us?”

“But Mamma, I’m too little to work on the monuments. I’m useless to him.” She buried her face in Jabez’ chest. Her small body heaved under the heavy strain of her sobs.

“No baby, you will grow. All of us start tiny, and we must grow.” Jabez stroked her daughter’s long dark hair, thinking about how to address Anaiah about these rumors. They were getting out of control! She was going to have to speak with her about keeping her dark thoughts to herself, especially if her daughter, Enice, was going to spread these rumors to the other children. “Dry your eyes baby. It will be ok. Everything will be alright.” She held her daughter out at arm’s length to look into her face, and tenderly wiped away Bithian’s tears with her thumbs, glancing out the window at the setting sun, “Your dad will be home soon, do you want to go get him some cool water?” Bithian gulped some air, “Yes mamma, I think Daddy would like that.”

“Good girl” Jabez whispered as her daughter walked away.

~~~

In the next house over, Anaiah peered out the window, her face careworn, her forehead crinkled as her brows crowded toward the center. Boaz was due home at any time now. She had packed a light knapsack with things they would need for the new baby. She looked at the bundle sitting on the table in the center of the room. Tonight, was supposed to be the night.

Anaiah was unsure they could leave tonight; she pushed her long sun bleached hair from her face as she sighed. Her face was arranged into lines of worry. She had begun having birthing pains in the day. Even so, she packed and planned to leave. Perhaps these were false pains, her body practicing to give birth. She tried to delude herself, but she knew better. She had given birth before. Her mind denied what her body knew.

“Enice, my sweet, do you have your good traveling shoes on?”

“Yes momma, but why did you ask me to put them on? Are we going somewhere?”

“We are, we are going on a very long walk tonight after the sun goes down. Can you help your sister get hers on as well please?”

“After the sun goes down?” Enice asked anxiously, “Won’t the cobras get us?”

“No baby, I think we can avoid them. Pack a small knapsack of clothes for you and your sister, you may each take a toy on our walk.”

“Where are we going Momma? When will we be back?”

“Oh baby, we are not coming back, not ever. We must leave for the baby to be safe, remember what we talked about?”

“I do mamma. Mamma, I am scared.” Anaiah could see that Enice was trying to be brave, but tears escaped her eyes.

“I know baby, so am I.” Anaiah whispered.

~~~

As the sun slipped behind the horizon the slaves prepared to leave the pits. The bricks they had made that day had been set out to dry. Hay was piled near the mud pits

to be mixed the next day. Boaz and Abihu both stood near the water, awaiting their turn to wash away some of the day's grime. Boaz's lined face carried more worry than was usual.

"So that baby of yours should be due any day now, huh Boaz?" an overseer clasped Boaz by the shoulder.

"Not for another few months Ptah, it will be some time yet," Boaz forced out a chuckle. "Though I am quite sure my wife wishes the baby would come sooner, late pregnancy seems such a hardship. Only the joy of a baby on the breast makes my wife willing to do it again." He laughed, but Abihu could see that Boaz's shoulders held tension, that his feet looked poised to run. His smile did not reach his eyes.

Is it you then, whose wife will be giving birth soon Abihu?" the guard shifted his attention.

Afraid not," he laughed. "The midwife says it will be about another four months or so. Seems like your timing is off a bit."

"Oh, with so many Hebrews being born it is hard to keep track," Ptah said. "Truthfully, I was just wondering when we could count on your wives back in the pits. They are great workers." He smiled, "guess it will be some time before they are back." He glanced back at the group of overseers giving an almost imperceptible shake of his head. "Back to the grind I suppose," he said, moving away from the two men.

Abihu moved closer to Boaz, and spoke in a low voice, "I thought Anaiah was due very soon? Why did you lie?"

"Due any day now, but I don't want the overseers to know. I am afraid for the baby's life. Especially if she has a boy. I don't even want the midwives around her. We



will be leaving soon, we plan to leave before the baby is born, it will be difficult to hide the baby if the birth if it comes before we go, and very difficult to travel with a new baby.” Boaz’ voice was low and urgent, “Abihu, you and Jabez should come with us. Bring your family.” His voice changed, hopeful, yearning, “Imagine a fresh start, one where we are not slaves, and these new children of ours, the ones growing in our wives’ bellies, the children conceived in bondage, could be born in freedom. All the children after them could be conceived and born in freedom.”

“You really believe the overseers will kill the male children, don’t you?” Abihu was incredulous. “It doesn’t make sense, why would they kill their workforce?”

“I don’t think it will be the overseers, I think the midwives are the logical ones to do it. A quick broken neck at birth and no one is the wiser, and the family mourns a stillbirth. Pharaoh has stated there are too many of us.” Boaz grimaced, “He wants to thin us out, I think he is afraid we will rise against him. Did you see Belial today? How listless he was? His child was born three days ago, a male, a *stillbirth*.” His mouth twisted in disgust at the term “How many recent still births have been boys? Can you not put the evidence together?”

Abihu’s forehead creased as he thought. He didn’t keep track of all the births by any means, he was no scribe to record births and deaths. But he could not recall the last time he had heard the joyous news of a boy being born. He shook his head. “Just because we didn’t hear about it does not mean there have been no baby boys born.” He sighed, “and it would be dangerous for Jabez to travel right now anyway.”

“I can’t tell you what to do for your family. I only know what I need to do for mine.”

~~~

“Jabez, Love,” Abihu called out as he walked into the house, “When you give birth, how important is the midwife?”

“It can be done without one, is there a problem with the midwives? Is Pharaoh’s wife going to have another baby? Will she need both of our midwives?”

“No, I was talking to Boaz today, and he said a few things that got me thinking, let me ask, when was the last time you heard of a baby boy being born?”

“Keziah had a baby boy just the other day, poor dear, he was still born. She is heartbroken over it.” Jabez stood from her weaving, she put her hands against her lower back and arched in a luxurious stretch. Abihu caught his breath, admiring her beauty in that moment, the fire under the stew sending out dancing light that turned the wisps of hair that had escaped her braid into a beautiful, soft, red halo around her head. His smile faded.

“When is the last time you heard of a baby boy who was not still born?” He drank some cool water from the ladle in the bucket on the table.

“Um, that would be Dinah, but her poor baby passed away before he was three months old. Terrible thing.” She moved to the fire and stirred the stew for tonight’s dinner. The firelight played across the bottom of her distended belly, licking up the sides of the rounded mound in a way Abihu found ominous.

“How did he die?”

“I don’t know, I just know he passed. I have not spoken to Dinah since I heard the boy passed. Poor thing must be grieving.” Jabez stood straight, putting her hands on her lower back, she stretched and sighed, “There have been a lot of girls born recently

though. It seems like almost everyone is having girls right now. Why all this talk of other people's babies? Why are you asking about having a baby without the midwife?"

"Boaz was talking again today. I guess he got into my head a little. He invited us to come with his family when they leave, and I have to say he had me considering it. He says he thinks the midwives break the necks of the baby boys when they are born, I didn't believe it, but the more I thought about it the more I could not remember any boys being born. It got me a bit worried. I was wondering how hard it would be for us to conceal the baby's birth if you did it without a midwife. I don't think he is right, but it might be a good precaution."

"My husband, even if we can conceal the birth, which I don't know how successfully we could do that, we cannot conceal a baby for long. What do you propose we do if we have a boy as he gets older? We can't run." She handed Abihu a bowl of stew.

"We dress him as a girl, possibly preserve his life." Abihu shook his head, "I don't think we have anything to worry about, but I don't want to risk you my wife, and I do not want any harm to come to the baby." He sat down to eat. Jabez joined him with a bowl of her own. They ate, each wrapped in their own thoughts.

~~~

Anaiah sat in a chair, her feet splayed wide on the floor, one hand on her belly, the other braced against her table. Her stomach visibly tightened as her jaw tightened and her brow furrowed. Her breath came in quick sharp exhalations. Once the pain subsided, she pressed her face to the tabletop, breathing in slow measured breaths. her face twisted in a grimace as she pounded a fist against the stone tabletop. As her head

lay on the table, tears dropped wetly against the surface. "Too late" she thought, "we waited too long to leave, and now our family will pay a terrible price because we waited," She pushed the thoughts away as best she could. She knew it was important to rest between contractions, but the thoughts would not go. Leaving would be impossible now, at least until after the birth. Unsettling thoughts circled round and round in her brain. Could she bring this baby into the world alone? Could she hide the birth, the baby, from the midwives? From the overseers? How could her family travel with a newborn? Would trying to leave just cause the very thing they were trying to avoid? Her head snapped up and her feet splayed once more another contraction rolled over her.

~~~

It was well past midnight when Jabez heard the hesitant tapping on the door.

"Enice, *ahuva* what are you doing out at this hour? You should be sleeping!"

Jabez asked, looking out into the night.

"Momma needs you Jabez, she says the baby is coming, but there is something wrong, and daddy doesn't know what to do."

Jabez sighed, "Hang on, I need to get dressed."

Using a wet rag, Jabez sponged the sweat off Anaiah's brow. The woman had struggled for hours. Jabez could see that Anaiah was getting tired, she was sleeping between contractions, and the effort to push was getting weaker. Jabez felt the baby through the taught muscles during a contraction. She inhaled sharply at what she felt, her friend was in trouble. She felt her throat closing off. It must have been an effort to remain calm and speak.

“Anaiah, *mammy*, the baby is breech. We must call a midwife. I don’t think we have a choice.”

“No, Jabez, I trust you, you won’t betray me. The midwives will kill the baby if it’s a boy. I trust you to keep it quiet.”

Jabez pressed against Anaiah’s belly, she must have been thinking furiously. No Hebrew woman grew up without learning something about bringing babies into the world, but the midwives were specially trained to deal with issues like this. “I can try to turn the baby after the next contraction, but if I can’t, you and the baby could both die. We must do something.” Jabez glanced at the door, where Boaz stood with his arms crossed. “Boaz, she could die. Are you sure you don’t want the midwives?”

“I think losing the baby might kill her anyway. If it is a boy, and the midwife breaks his neck, Anaiah may just die of sorrow.” Boaz rocked on his feet.

Anaiah groaned as another contraction gripped her. Jabez pushed her sweat soaked hair from her face, and wiped her face with the rag, “Breath Anaiah, breath, work with the pain, not against it.” She placed her hands against the tight skin of Anaiah’s swollen belly, waited for it to relax, and put gentle pressure on the bottom of her abdomen. She attempted to turn the baby, applying pressure between contractions, but her efforts were fruitless. Contractions continued to take a toll on Anaiah, Jabez had no more choices. She leaned over and spoke to Enice.

“*Ahuva*, I don’t want to scare you, but your mamma is not doing well, and I cannot help her. You need to get Shiphrah. She has experience turning babies.”

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Shiphrah held up a squirming baby, red, fresh from the womb. “It’s a girl,” she smiled a tired, relieved smile. “A beautiful baby girl,” she wrapped the child in a soft blanket, “What will you name her?” she asked as she placed the baby in Anaiah’s arms.

“Her name is Simcha,” Anaiah smiled down at her baby’s head as she held the baby’s head to her breast. Tears dropped onto Hadassah’s head as she latched on and began to suckle. “She’s perfect.”

Jabez rejoiced that her friend and the baby both lived through the birth, Boaz must have been ecstatic that the baby was a girl. Both sagged against the walls, with tired smiles across their faces, tears slipping out of their eyes. Boaz offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, crossed the room, and gathered his wife and new daughter in his arms.

“Enice,” Anaiah called weakly, “Come meet your sister, Simcha,”

Shiphrah slipped away in the night, summoned to another birth. Wiping away tears she must have prayed that the next baby would not be a boy. She would not give in to Pharaoh’s demands. She would not. She could not. She didn’t know what the consequences of defying him would be, but she couldn’t do it. She had instructed the women who had boys to disguise them as girls. It would not work forever, but it might buy them some time.

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After the birth of their daughter, Boaz and Anaiah relaxed. The urgency of leaving diminished, the rumors started to settle down without Boaz talking about leaving all the time. Anxious days and nights passed slowly for Jabez. Over four months, she watched

Anaiah feed and care for her baby as she healed from birth, and then return to the mud pits. Anaiah took the baby with her daily to the pits. Making bricks was hard work Jabez knew, and it must be even more so with a baby slung against her chest as she worked, but she must have been so relieved to have a girl, and afraid the baby would be snatched during the day she insisted on carrying the baby along. The insistence on keeping her baby with her wormed its way into Jabez's head, made her anxious for the birth of her own baby. She worked the loom, sewed clothes, wove blankets, cooked meals, and counted the days.

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Pharaoh Khenephres dismissed the Hebrew midwives and shook his head. He wondered how many boys had been born since he had instructed the midwives to kill them. He wondered how they could have disobeyed him. His original solution had seemed so clean, so easy. The parents would have been told their boys were stillbirths. He thought no one would have been the wiser. He pushed his hands over his face and thought of other solutions, unfortunately, less clean ones. He knew there were rumors in the slave town about his ordering the boys killed, but he also knew most of the slaves did not take the rumors seriously. What rumors were being spread he wondered. He called for his overseers; they overheard so many slave conversations. Perhaps there was a solution to his problem amidst the slaves' rumors.

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Jabez paced the floor, pausing to place her hands on the loom every ten minutes or so, her fingers curling tightly over the edges of the frame, bracing, breathing intensely, intentionally slow and deep. Once the pain had passed, she pushed away

from the loom and resumed pacing. Her time was near. She knew from experience that walking would help the baby come more quickly. She tried to keep her thoughts on the impending birth, the joy of cuddling a newborn in her arms once again. She pushed away thoughts of the vile rumors, but they kept intruding on her, shattering her calm. It would be hours yet before she gave birth, and the anxiety those thoughts caused was doing her no favors. Images of babies having their necks broken at birth were the least frightening. Images created by her mind included babies being ripped from their mother's hands, their heads cut from their necks, bodies mutilated, their guts being pulled from their bodies, tiny entrails piled on the floor, tiny necks cracked in the rough hands of the overseers, babies forcibly pulled from the arms of their mothers, taken from the homes never to be seen again, thrown into crocodile infested waters, to drown or be eaten. One after another the images tumbled through her mind. Breathing deep she pushed them out, and settled into a rhythm; pace, pause, grip, brace, breathe, think calming thoughts, see the baby in her arms, walk, concentrate on calming thoughts. Calming thoughts gave way to the horrific parade of death. The pains came more frequently, the cycles became shorter. Pains came about every five minutes now. In only a few more hours the urge to push would come. Walk, pause, contract, breathe, walk. Calm thoughts. At least try for them. The children were at Anaiah's house, they did not need to see this process yet. Abihu would be home soon.

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Pharaoh dismissed the overseers. He must have thought long and hard on what they had said. He was sure he had found a clean way to kill the male children, not as clean as the death at birth, but it would do. The problem he considered now lay in how



to carry it out. The overseers were no good, they saw the slaves as humans. Over time they became emotionally invested in the slaves; they built relationships with them. Emotional investment, he was sure, was why his plan with the midwives had failed. Coming from the same community, the midwives had humanized the Hebrews. He needed people who were not continually in proximity to the slaves, people who only saw the slaves as production equipment. He paced the floor, thinking deeply about his problem. He decided the most humane thing would be to have the children taken shortly after birth. Mothers would not have time to get overly attached and would not have to witness the babies die if he had them thrown into the river. But who? Who could do it? The thought popped into his head, of course! It was so obvious! His soldiers! They were used to killing people, killing on command. And the soldiers did not associate with the slaves. It was the perfect solution. The overseers would only have to report the births. Pharaoh sent for his generals.

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Jabez's cycle was growing shorter when Abihu walked into their house. "Oh, thank God you are home!" She paused to greet him. "I will need to push soon."

"Oh Jabez, is it time?" Abihu's face lit with joy. "I cannot wait to meet our new family member."

"It will be time to push soon. We will need one of the midwives." Jabez stopped to grip the loom, concentrating on breathing. Once the contraction subsided, she continued, "Will you get one of them please?"

Abihu nodded, hugged his wife, and dashed out his door. He did not notice Ptah standing guard in the street. Ptah did however notice the joy on Abihu's face. The

overseer took careful note of where Abihu went. He dashed off to let the general know what he suspected was transpiring, as he had been instructed earlier today. He was unsure why the Pharaoh had demanded to know about the Hebrew births. Some new sort of record keeping he supposed.

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Abihu and Puah arrived just as Jabez started feeling the urge to push. Puah set up the birthing stool in the middle of the room and took Anaiah's hand. "Come on Lovely, let's crouch down on the stool. Oh, there's another birthing pain, let's wait until it passes. Ah, there we are. Now pop up and onto the stool." Puah's calm demeanor came from many years of experience. She saw quickly that the birth should be an easy one. Once Jabez was properly settled on the stool, the midwife directed Abihu to gently rub his wife's back in an effort to help ease the birthing pains and set out the materials she would need; A sharp knife for cutting the cord, rags for cleaning the baby, a soft blanket for swaddling, and a bowl for the afterbirth. She placed a low stool near the birthing stool so that she could see what was happening. "Ok, Jabez, on the next contraction I need you to bear down. I am going to see if I can feel where the baby is." Jabez nodded her understanding. She gritted her teeth and bore down when the next pain washed over her. Puah reached out to feel the baby, murmuring encouragement to Jabez. "The baby is near, I can feel the head, it will crown in the next few contractions. Relax between them. This will not be difficult."

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Soldiers stationed themselves outside Abihu's house, listening to the proceedings inside. They had orders, but patience was necessary. They needed to let

the birth proceed naturally, without alarming the family. Pharaoh wanted to ensure that his equipment remained undamaged. The soldiers understood their first mission was to find out the gender of the baby. Everything they were ordered to do after they knew depended on that.

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Puah stood, holding up the baby. She shook her head, lowering her voice. "Listen carefully, you have a beautiful baby boy." Jabez's face lit up as she reached for the baby.

"We shall name him Azael," she said as she pulled him to her breast. Abihu nodded his agreement, smiling widely.

"Wait," Puah dropped her voice, speaking rapidly, "The Pharaoh called Shiphrah and I to him a few weeks ago, and bade us kill all the male children. Dress the baby as a girl and use a girl's name. Hide him, lest Pharaoh find him with another plan to remove the male children."

Jabez's face crumbled as she pulled the baby even more tightly against her chest, placing her lips on top of his soft head "No," she whispered, "I don't believe you." Tears slipped down her face, "No one could be that cruel." She sobbed. The anxiety she felt for the last few months made a knot in her belly. She thought she might vomit.

"Believe me, or don't but the baby has a better chance of living if you hide him. He is beautiful. Please protect him." Puah packed her birthing things and slipped out the door. She did not see the soldiers standing quietly in the shadows.

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The soldiers spoke in hushed tones, "Did you hear?"

“Yes, a boy,”

“We have a duty.”

“I know, I don’t like it, I don’t understand it, but I know.” The soldiers moved into the house.

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Jabez was feeding the baby. Abihu sat next to her, with his arms around her. They discussed in low voices how to hide the baby. Abihu looked up and saw the shadows of two people approaching, their shadows long in the setting sun, sliding through the door. He grabbed their son away from Jabez with no explanation, attempting to hide him, as two tall men in armor came through the door. One reached for the baby, “Let me see the little *yeh’-led*,” he said, not unkindly.

“No,” Jabez sobbed, snatching him. The second soldier pushed Abihu away gently and extracted the baby from Jabez’s arms. She jumped up, reaching for her son in the arms of the Soldier.

“He, she’s a newborn, she needs to eat, and it is cold out there so we must keep hi – er warm.” Jabez sobbed. As she grabbed the Soldier’s arm he jerked to the side, and Jabez fell to the floor. He dashed out the door, holding the child as if he was a dirty rag and he was trying to avoid getting dirt on his uniform. Jabez tried to crawl after the man, “No, please, bring him back!” she wept. The first soldier moved to block the door, keeping the family inside, “Don’t worry, we will take care of him. It will be over before he knows it.”

Abihu jumped to his feet, intent on following the soldier who took his new son away. He tried to shove his way past the soldier stationed at the door, who pushed him

back roughly. The soldier growled at Abihu, “We took it as soon as we could, to spare your feelings. You will not be attached to it; you didn’t have time to get attached to it. We did this the merciful way. Stop, or we will suspend our mercy, and slaughter your other children as well. If you continue to fight after that we will take your wife’s life as well, and you will be left alone to toil at making bricks with no family to return to at night. You can lose one you don’t even know, or you can lose all.” Abihu backed away slowly, his eyes burning with anger, but clearly understanding the choice forced upon him, and his family. He held his wife as she sobbed, reaching out for the child that would never return. They knew the truth now. They had to leave. Soon. He would ensure his family never forgot this, losing a child because they didn’t take rumors about the impending death seriously. This was a story he would pass down for generations. He looked at his wife and promised himself that if he could help it in any way, his family members would never forget this event and never again be caught unaware. Never. It was his vow.

Jabez looked back at her empty home. It was a home no more. She was leaving, with her family. She turned, grabbed Bithian’s hand, following her husband and son. The sound of the splash she never heard followed her across the desert.

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“Grandpa! You always tell us this story. Is it true?” the children were mesmerized by Abram’s story.

“It is absolutely true, passed down for generations by our family. We lost someone when Pharaoh threw the babies in the river. We need to never forget that. We need to sift the truth from them and protect our family. We tell the story so we will never

forget. But tonight, I tell you the story because I heard rumblings at the market, I think we need to pay attention to.

Chapter 1

Abram bent over the small gears, peering at them through magnifying glasses held in place by a stand. He used tweezers to place another gear in the ornate wooden cabinet he built the week before. The bell on the door chimed announcing a customer. He stood from his work to greet his customers. "Good afternoon, ladies. Welcome to Cogs and Gears, my small shop. Every clock you see, I built by hand. He smiled. His customers knew all this before they even walked in the door, but it was his standard greeting. It was expected.

"Hello Abram, I need a gift. It is my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary. I need a clock worthy of it."

"Of course, take a look around, let me know what you like, and we will discuss it." Abram didn't want to hover around his customers, He turned back to his work, "I will be here, just call when you need me."

The young lady nodded, and began to browse, chattering with her companions. A tall, straight blond man with a long nose and a kind face. He was dressed as a Polish soldier. Some of the young women were dating the Polish men. Abram approved. He knew he was an outlier, most of the Jewish people in the community relied on a matchmaker to set up marriages for their youth. He believed that if Polish married Jewish women, they too might become Jewish and expand their community. He set to work on the clock once more, keeping an ear open to their conversation, so he would know when he was needed.

"Franz, look at this one, it is beautiful."

"They are all beautiful, my dear. I see that he is quite a useful man. Such talent. I hope he does well when we consolidate the communities."

“When will you start moving us? Will the new cities that are being built be nice?”

“I imagine they will. We call them Ghettos. It will allow your people to grow closer to one another.” Franz pointed to a cuckoo clock, “This one is particularly fine, gilded, and beautiful. Perhaps this is the one?”

“Yes, the carving is very nice. Abram, Let’s talk about this one.”

Abram moved from behind his table, reaching his customer’s side. He began to detail the materials used in the making of the clock, but he filed away the talk about the ghettos for future consideration, the conversation fit with a few other things he had been hearing recently, none of it added up to anything good.

Chapter 2

"Malka, I'm home," Abram called as he walked in the door. He inhaled deeply and knew that his wife had been baking this afternoon. He removed his thick wool long coat hanging it on a rack in the corner. His wife emerged from the kitchen wiping her hands on a towel.

"Welcome home my love, how was your day?" She offered a cheek for a kiss. "Dinner is almost ready."

"Good! It is so wet and dreary outside, I will be glad of a warm dinner!" he boomed, "And do we have any of our children or grandchildren here to share the meal?"

"Not yet, but I expect Rani here any moment. She is bringing Raisa and Samuel tonight for dinner, so that she and Omer can go out for a night. She is also bringing a pie for you."

"I get my grandchildren all night?" Abram smiled. "And a pie too? Pumpkin I hope?"

Malka nodded, "Yes, love, she knows what you like."

I love pie of any sort," he laughed, "But our grandchildren, they are far better than any pie," his eyes twinkled with merriment.

"I know. You act like a child every time they are here. You will find the book of fairy tales on the table next to your chair with your pipe and slippers. Everything is ready for you to spoil them."

"I hardly spoil them, I simply give them affection," Abram smiled.

"Is that what it's called my love? Letting them stay up past their bedtime when they give you the puppy-dog eyes, slipping them money, and making them toys?" Malka chided him gently.

“It is no more than you, making them their favorite foods for dinner, and ensuring there are plenty of fresh cookies,” Abram smiled. He knew they were both guilty of spoiling their grandchildren. They needed their grandchildren like they needed air. Nothing, he mused, was more important than family. How wonderful it was to be a grandparent!

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After dinner, the children were excited.

“Grandpa! Grandpa, tell us a story?” Samuel practically danced out of the brightly lit kitchen.

“I need to help grandma clear the dishes, little man, and then, yes.”

“I’ve got it, my love. Go read to those children.”

“No, don’t read Grandpa, tell us the story of our Egyptian ancestors again,” Raisa pleaded.

“That one again? Ok!” Abram settled himself in his armchair by the fire and lit a pipe. Tobacco smoke curled over his head; the firelight played across his olive skin. The creases in his face accentuated his joy, his dark eyes sparkled. Samuel crawled into his lap and Raisa sat at his feet. “In the days of the Pharaoh” he launched into the story, but in the back of his mind, he replayed the conversation he heard in his shop earlier that night. Something about it was not quite right. What was it the girl said, something about the Jewish communities being moved?

~~~

Abram stood, after tucking his grandchildren into bed, stories told, kisses distributed. He paused by the door with his hand on the light switch, as the sound of Samuel's voice reached him.

"Grandpa, is the story true?" he asked.

"It is, and we must remember it, and never let it happen again. We need to be aware, vigilant. I love you." He clicked off the light and closed the door, pausing to consider all the times he performed the same action with his children. How marvelous to have children in the room again. He ran his fingers over the grow marks on the door frame, an initial next to each, to indicate who's mark it was. His feet sank in the deep carpet as he walked down the hallway, the banister smooth and warm beneath his hand, oak, covered in beeswax, rubbed until smooth. Malka reapplied the wax on the third Thursday of every month, taking care and pride in their house. It had been in his family for four generations. Malka was waiting in the living room, the light from the fire played on her hair, casting shadows and highlights on her face. He sat, pulling her close. She laid her head on his chest.

"My love, I am growing concerned. I overheard a conversation today about moving our communities. It fits well with the rumors of Hitler's distaste for us."

"Some of the young women at the market today were talking about how they would have new opportunities once they were in Jewish centric, Jewish controlled neighborhoods. I wondered what they meant."

"I think we must be aware, and be prepared to leave, if it comes to that. I may be over-reacting, but I have no wish to repeat Abihu's folly. Perhaps we need to start setting money aside, just in case."

Malka sighed and stretched against his chest. She snuggled in and sighed. He wrapped his hands around her slight form, marveling at her blue-black hair, so striking with her green eyes.

"I trust your judgment. Did you see how much Raisa has grown? She needs new skirts! And she will need a haircut soon."

"It is hard to believe that Samuel will have his bar mitzvah soon." Abram let his worries slip away discussing their family, relaxing with his wife.

~~~

The sun was just peaking over the horizon when Malka and Abram rose the next morning. The sun painted the sky in a parade of delicate colors Malka stopped to admire as she scooped up the morning paper. She sat at the dining room table with a hot cup of tea and split the paper between herself and Abram. She and Abram sat across from one another, each skimming their portion of the paper. After a few moments, she gasped, "Abram, war has broken out in Germany."

"Has it my love?" Abram looked up from his reading, "I wonder what the war is over? We should pray for the soldiers involved, pray for the poor Germans affected by the war, and pray that the war passes us by, but, also, we must consider the story of Jabez, and be prepared to flee."

Malka peered out the window, sun glinting in her green eyes, "Yes, I hope it passes us by. You are too old to fight in a war, and I do not want our sons or our son in law to have to fight." She paused, and sucked in a deep breath, "I really hope we don't need to flee. This is our home."

Abram stood and swept her into a comforting embrace “All we can do is wait, listen to the rumors, and react accordingly. The war is a world away, my love, and our family is here. Speaking of which, I can hear our grandchildren upstairs. I think they are up,” he released her as the grandchildren came tumbling down the stairs into the living room.

“Grandpa, Grandpa, what are we going to do today?” Raisa asked.

Abram released his wife and placed a wicker basket into his granddaughter’s tiny hands, “Take your brother and go gather eggs to start with,” he laughed “and maybe we can get some breakfast.” His eyes reflected his smile as he watched the kids run out the door. He turned back to his wife, “Let’s not buy trouble if we don’t need to, we’ve no reason to think the Germans would come here.”

Malka wanted to serve the grandchildren fresh milk for breakfast. Stepping out to milk their cow, she shaded her eyes looking out toward the main thoroughfare. She noticed plumes of dust marking the passage of a carriage. “That’ll be Omer and Rami, ” she thought as she moved to the cow’s stall in the large barn and took her place on the milking stool. She began squeezing Flower’s utters methodically. The carriage rolled to a stop in the gravel next to the barn, and her daughter and son-in- law stepped out just as she stood with the bucket of milk.

“Let me get that mother,” Omer dashed forward to take the milk bucket. “Does this mean we are in time for breakfast?” his eyes twinkled with merriment and the thought of Malka’s cooking.

“You are indeed! But if you would rather have goat’s milk, she still needs to be milked,” Malka gestured towards the brown and white patchworked goat.

"I'm on it," Omer grinned. Malka nodded, smiling, well acquainted with his preferences.

"Come on Mama, I'll help you make breakfast." Malka nodded and led Rani into the house.

"How was your night?"

"It could have been much better," Rani said, reaching into the cupboard to grab a large mixing bowl. She was a younger version of her mother with waist length blue-black hair, pulled back into a neat braid, wisps and curls escaping around her head with a halo-like effect and stunning green eyes. She was tall and slender, with the body of a dancer.

"There were some Polish Soldiers out who were being incredibly rude." She poured flour into the bowl and reached for the butter. "I'll make the biscuits."

"Rude how? I will start with the gravy then, pass me the sausage."

"Oh, some of the usual, calling us Kikes, and throwing insults. It was strange though, one of them started talking about how much better it would be once we are all moved into the villages, they are setting aside for us, how they would be free of us. He talked on and on about how the Germans would see to us. He said it is though I should know what he was talking about, and be afraid, but I have no idea." She turned out the dough and began cutting the circles.

"Oof, war broke out in Germany according to today's paper. I wonder if the Polish soldiers think the Germans are going to invade. That fits too well with some of the rumors and conversations we have heard. Your father heard something about

consolidating the Jewish communities into a kind of city they called a ghetto in his shop yesterday. He is concerned, you know, Jabez and Abihu.”

Rani sighed and nodded, “I hope not, but it could be.”

“Your father and I talked about it this morning and we think it is time to start stockpiling money just in case.”

“That is easier said than done with children, mother.” Rani sighed, “I sometimes wonder how you and father did so well, there were five of us. We only have the two and we struggle.”

“Your father is a genius, that is how we managed,” Malka grinned, “but I know what you mean. It can be difficult. Let’s do what we can though. Do you need anything from the market? I need to go this afternoon.”

Rani nodded, “If you think it is important, we will try to put some money aside mother. I would love some fresh fruit for the kids if you can find some. Here, these biscuits are ready.” She passed the pan to her mother.

~~~

Malka walked through the street market pausing to look at the vegetables for dinner that night. The weather had turned gray and cool, she thought a storm may be blowing in.

“What do you need today, Malka?” The vendor knew her well.

“Good morning, Zeke,” she smiled, “I was thinking of a nice lamb stew for dinner tonight.” She reached out and grabbed a potato with a gloved hand, “These look great today! I was hoping to find some mushrooms and onions, maybe some peppers?”

"I have all that, you just got here before I could put it out! Just enough for you and Abram tonight? Or will the kids or grandkids be joining?"

"Just Me and Abram tonight, the kids are all out of town, in fact Rani and Omer just left for a campout with the kids this morning." Malka said.

Zeke bagged her produce, "Good choice to be out of town right now, if there is any truth to the rumors going around." He sighed, "I thought about sending my children away as well, rumor has it that the Germans will move into Poland soon."

"Why would the Germans want to invade us?" Malka inquired.

"I heard that Hitler wants to make "Germany whole again" whatever that means. I know he thinks there are what he refers to as "real Germans" in Austria. Perhaps he thinks there are some here too? I hear he thinks "real Germans" are superior people in the world, and he plans to populate the world with them." He handed Malka the bag, "You said lamb stew? Joseph has some lamb, two stalls down." Malka exchanged some coins for the vegetables, "Thank you," she moved on, but her mind lingered over the idea of Hitler's "superior" people.

Chapter 3

KA-BOOM!

The Germans announced their arrival in Poland with the roar of a cannon. The Germans marched through Poland slowly, subduing people along the way, but news traveled slower than the Germans, so Malka and Abram were unaware of the atrocities taking place against the Jews in Germany. They continued their normal daily activities as best they could, while listening for news, for rumors, for anything that could help them be prepared for whatever came at them. But they both felt uneasy, as though the time to leave was growing nearer, Hitler's deep distaste for Jews was already widely known. Disagreements between Polish citizens sprang up in the streets, tempers short as tensions grew high, and violence among the populace was breaking out even without the Germans being present among them. As weeks after the invasion progressed, whispers came through, whispers about brutality against the Jews, but no one was sure what that treatment was.

Malka and Abram constantly discussed different ways they could keep their family safe, both against the mounting violence surrounding them, and the German maltreatment. Abram moved from being concerned to feeling real fear for his family's safety when he began hearing rumors about Jews who were rounded up and carted away by the Germans. The rumors said that the Jewish people who the Germans took away never came home. Abram knew that he and Malka did not yet have the money to take their family and leave, but he was desperate for a way to protect them from being rounded up and taken away. He thought about it while working long hours in his shop, at night long after Malka slept, it occupied his mind. The more he thought, the more a

potential answer became clear to him. The key, he decided, was to hide in plain sight. Once he had made up his mind, he proposed his plan to Malka.

“Abram, do you really think it will work?” she asked.

“My love, it is the only expedient method we have. It is a gamble for sure, a single person leveling accusations at us could sink us, but if it works, we avoid what the Germans have in store for us. I don’t believe it can be anything good, where are all the Jews they round up? Where do they go? And perhaps more ominous, why don’t they ever come back? I don’t want to find out firsthand if we can avoid it.” Abram sought Malka’s eyes with his own, uncharacteristically, no joy lit his face. “And if it does not work, perhaps they will kill us quickly as a family, and we will not face whatever evil they have planned.” He grasped her hands, “I want us to live into very old age together, I think this is our best chance.”

Malka nodded her agreement. He had convinced her. His plan sounded like a great way to avoid scrutiny by the Germans. They talked long into the night, Abram filling in the details of his plan for Malka. She added to the plan so that it was fully fleshed out.

Once Abram and Malka decided on a course of action to follow, they realized that they needed to convince the children. This was going to be a large change for them, and their overall lifestyles. Once they were prepared, they invited their children over to discuss the plan.

Abram sat at the large mahogany dinner table surrounded by his family. He smiled warmly at his wife; her beautiful face lit with the soft warm light in the room. He admired how her eyes sparkled in the light, with love for her family and a determination

to keep them safe. Reaching out his hands he clasped those of his wife on one side and his eldest son on the other, signaling the rest of his family to form a circle of clasped hands. He bowed his head offering thanks to the Lord for their meal, family, and all their many blessings. Raising his head, he looked at his wife, squeezing her hand briefly, as his five children and two grandchildren reached for their forks. Malka nodded encouragingly; to prepare, they had planned this discussion in some detail, predicted their children's likely responses, and thought about how to address them. He released her hand and reached for the kettle of soup on the table and ladled a portion into his bowl made of blue porcelain. He passed the kettle to his left and reached for a slice of the bread Malka baked earlier in the day. He dipped his knife into the butter, looking down as he slid the butter filled knife over his bread, he began to speak.

"Your mother and I are so happy and blessed to have you all here tonight, but we have an ulterior motive." He raised his head, looking at each of his children in turn, ensuring he had their attention. "We wanted to have a very serious conversation with you," he started. "With the war, tensions and violence among our communities are escalating. But worse, we have been hearing some disturbing rumors about the Germans and their violence against the Jewish population. We are deeply concerned for the safety of our family." His eyes sought his wife again, "We worry the war, and the violence will roll over us, and we will be caught in the storm." Malka nodded in agreement. He paused, took a deep breath, moved his gaze back to their children again, and continued, "I have no intention using our family to re-enact the story of Jabez and Abihu. I think we should move out of Poland. I am thinking maybe Austria, or the Netherlands. Possibly even the United States. At least until the war is over."

“Do you have the money to do that yet? I know mother and I were talking about saving up some money, but that was not that long ago.”

“Not yet, but your mother and I have a plan for that as well. We will tell you that bit after we have answered all your questions.”

“Dad, who will run your business?” Jakob gasped.

“I will sell it. I already have a buyer lined up.”

“The house Dad?” Gabriel asked.

“We will rent it to another family, it should be available when we come home.”

Abram sighed, “Those are great questions boys, your mother and I have talked long about this idea and thought of those things. Raina, Leah, Sarah, do you have any additional questions? You may think of something your mother and I have not.”

Leah rolled her eyes, “Are we overreacting a bit? Some of those Soldiers are handsome, and I am not married.”

“I don’t think the soldiers have their minds on marriage Leah,” Malka said. “They are busy fighting.” She took a deep breath, “And even if they were not fighting, the rumors we are hearing suggest they would not be fond of Jewish girls anyway.”

Raina stated that she and Omar wanted to get the children out before there was violence, and Sarah simply shook her head from side to side, indicating she had no questions.

Abram looked at Malka again, and she nodded. “So, as Raina pointed out, we don’t have the money to leave yet. I want us to be able to hide from the Germans, even if they walk right into our house. Kids, I heard a rumor in my shop that the Germans are making the Jewish people register and place a J on their IDs. We are not going to

register. In fact, we are going to get new identification before the Germans get here, identification that reflects a gentile name. We chose the name Fischer, German for fisherman. We thought it fitting, as we are fishing for a way to protect our family. We already ordered it for all of us. Once it arrives, we will write a bill of sale for the house, essentially selling it to Samuel, with the gentile last name. Our hope is that it will protect our property.”

“In Samuel’s name?” Rani asked, “Why?”

Malka answered, “We don’t know how long the war will last. As the youngest man in the family, we thought it the best long-term solution to keep the house in the family.”

Leah rolled her eyes again, “We really are overreacting, why would we hide who we are? We are liked and respected in the community.”

“Among our Jewish community Leah,” Rani cut her off. “But even the Polish soldiers are beginning to treat the Jewish people poorly. Where are the Jews the Germans load into trucks and take away what we have heard so much about? No one ever sees them again. I want to protect my children in case it gets worse.”

“Why are you always arguing Leah,” Jakob asked, “When have our father and mother ever done you any wrong?”

“Remember the story of Jabez and Abihu, Leah,” Gabriel added gently. Gabriel and Jakob were opposites in every way, Jakob was short and stocky with light brown hair and hazel eyes. He also had a brisk, efficient manner. Gabriel was tall, slender, almost willowy in build with soft sensitive almost black-brown eyes and deep chestnut colored hair. His was a softer manner when dealing with his sister.

“That’s just a story Gabriel, and I cannot believe you still believe it.” Leah stood, “I’m leaving, do what you want, I won’t be participating.” She pushed in her chair and took her bowl to the sink. “I’m not hungry. I have my eye on a soldier, and I intend to get married.” She strode out the door, slamming it behind her. Abram shook his head; she had always been a difficult child. He stood to follow her, but Malka grabbed his arm,

“Abram, she has always had a wild streak. We must allow her to run free, she will return. She always has.”

Abram knew his wife was right. He sighed as he sat back down at the table. The rest of the family continued dinner, discussing the implications of moving, changing names and hiding in plain sight. By the time Malka served dessert, the family had agreed on the best way forward.

Abram read the drowsy children a story after dinner and tucked them into bed. As the adults in the family sat together in comfortable silence drinking coffee in the living room in front of the fire, they heard a muffled shout from the street outside, followed by the sound of someone pounding on the door a few moments later. Omer hopped to his feet, strode to the door, and opened it. A soldier flung Leah to the floor. “I found this girl; she says she belongs here.”

Abram helped his daughter stand, nodding, “Yes, this is my daughter,” he said.

“Keep her here inside. Keep everyone inside. No one leaves, this neighborhood is now subject to a curfew. Leave after ten PM, and you will face the consequences. They are severe.” The soldier turned on his heel, he glanced over his shoulder, “Filthy Jews, it is better than you deserve.” He strode away.

“What sort of consequences?” Malka wondered aloud.

Leah rubbed her shoulder where the Soldier's hand had been, Malka could see bruises on her skin.

"What happened?" Abram asked.

"I went to visit the Soldier I have my eye on. He and I have been talking for a while. The last time we spoke he mentioned talking to you about us Dad. He lives near your shop. I walked, it was such a clear night, I enjoyed the stars. But once I got there, he shoved me in the car, and brought me back. That was him. I don't know what changed since I saw him last" She began to sob quietly.

Chapter 4

Malka stood at the sink, washing dishes from the evening meal, when she heard the harsh guttural sounds of someone outside shouting in a language she had only just begun to recognize as German. Malka did not understand the shouts, she did not speak the language, she, like most of her neighbors spoke only in Polish and Yiddish. She reached out, swept aside the curtains so she could peer out and see the source of the commotion.

A young woman was walking down the street, a bag of groceries clutched in one arm, a small child holding her other hand. The child skipped along, smiling, spirited and happy, kicking up the colorful leaves that had fallen from the trees with the start of autumn. The shout came again, and the woman dropped her son's hand for a moment as she whirled around to face the source of the shout. Malka saw the woman visibly jump a bit, startled at the sight of a German officer shouting at her. The woman had a questioning look on her face and had begun to speak when her body seemingly began to dance, jerking about in time to the ratta-tat-tat beat of a machine gun.

The sound of the shots stopped, and the woman slumped to the ground as her child, face splattered by his mother's blood screamed, begging his mother to stand up. The German soldier approached the child, who bent over his mother's body, trying to shake her awake. The child was oblivious to the soldier's approach. Malka was unable to look away as he bashed in the child's skull with the butt of the rifle.

The child's body fell on top of the young woman. The German kicked the bodies with a heavy booted foot, spun on his heel, and strode away. Malka gasped as the woman, bleeding, mortally wounded but not yet dead from the gunshot wounds seemed

to try to cradle her child's ruined head against her breast. The woman gathered her child's body trying to crawl towards Malka and Abram's door.

Malka wanted to go to the woman, to help her, but the image of the woman's body jerking as it was pierced and punctured by projectiles stopped her. Malka squeezed her eyes shut and slid down the cabinets sinking to the floor. Malka's heart and conscience tugged at her. She knew if that woman could be saved, if the child could be saved, she should save them. Malka sobbed, the Torah commanded that all Jews preserve life, it was first among God's commandments, she felt the weight of responsibility, of duty to her fellow mankind. She suspected there was nothing she could do for the woman or the child, but shouldn't she try? If she went out to render aid, she risked her own life, and if she did not, if she could do anything for the woman and child, she abandoned the pair to certain death. The choice put a knot in her stomach.

As she sat on the floor, her legs splayed out in front of her, her back against the cabinet, her hair pulled out of its neat bun, into wild disarray, contemplating the choices she had, there was another burst of machine gun fire. Another curfew violation she wondered? How could violating a curfew warrant that sort of response? The gunfire made her decision for her. She leaned to the side and vomited on her Birdseye maple hardwood floor, then wiped away the residue with the back of her hand.

It seemed to Malka the incident had taken ages, a lifetime, a millennium, but she knew it could only have been seconds. Abram swept into the kitchen,

"What was that sound, Malka?" It took him a moment to register that she was on the floor. He grabbed a towel, swiftly cleaned her mess, then settled himself on the floor next to her. That was one of Abram's amazing qualities Malka half thought, he was

always ready to come to her, to meet her where she was, and on her terms. He reached out to stroke her hair, "What is it my Love? What has you so upset?" Malka recounted the tale to him, in a monotone voice, strained by emotions too deep to convey. Abram pulled her into a prone position, her head on his thigh, and stroked her hair.

"We must not go out after curfew. We must ensure the children don't either. But, for now, as long as we move before curfew, we can still come and go as we please. We are going to get out, Malka. We will move our family away from this curfew, and the consequences for breaking it. I think the children should move back in with us, my wife. We need to band together as a family. You are my life, our family, my life's blood. I won't allow any of you to be hurt." He sat on the floor with her, stroking her hair, singing soft songs to her, and praying for the safety of their family, thinking about Jabez, hoping they could get their family out of Poland before things got worse.

Malka sobbed softly, until she fell asleep under the soothing hands of her husband.

As the sun peeked over the horizon the next day, the air was crisp, the sky lit in a cascade of pinks and purples, Malka stepped outside to collect eggs. The beauty of the morning was a sharp contrast to the body of the woman and child still lying in the road, their eyes and skin crusted with a light frost. Malka thought for a moment how crazy it was that the sparkle of the frost was both beautiful and macabre at once. The woman's skin was a light blue shade, her blood had run to a low spot in the road where it pooled and froze. Malka had known they would be dead, for a moment she blamed herself for not helping them. After rational thought returned, she realized that, even if she had tried, she could not have saved them. It was still a shock to see their bodies still lying in the

street like litter, why hadn't the Germans picked up the bodies? Malka wondered who their family was, if the family knew what had happened to the woman and child, if the family would come for them. She said a fervent prayer that her family's gentile identification would show up soon. It should show up any day now, she and Abram had ordered it even before their meeting with the children. Already her family had defied the Germans, not getting the J on their identification. The Germans had not really started working though their neighborhood cataloging people yet, the Gentile name would really help them avoid notice.

Soon, she thought desperately. Please come soon, it was too late to do anything for this woman, too late for the small child laying across her body, but if it came soon, they should be able to save their family.

Malka replayed Abram's words in her mind from last night. As he soothed her, he had talked a lot about his plans for their family, but not just their family. He swore to her he would do all he could to save as many of their people as he could last night. He did not know how he would do that yet, but the reality of slaughter in the streets had galvanized him.

"Malka, our family is so much more than our family. Our family included that woman and girl out there. It is all the Jews. We have a shared history, a shared ancestry. There are others with stories like that of Jabez, even if they don't remember them."

She had been stunned at the passion in his voice, his conviction. After all, what could they do against the tide of German aggression? But seeing the bodies on the

street she added her own vows to his. Neither she nor Abram understood this was merely the beginning of the atrocities they would witness.

Chapter 5

The next week, Malka and Abram's family's new identification reflecting the last name Fischer arrived. That week and for the next several weeks, rounded up and displaced Jewish people also flooded into their neighborhood. The people who the Germans funneled in originated from other Jewish neighborhoods that had been "liquidated." After pushing the Jews into the neighborhood, the Germans sealed it off. No one with identification that indicated they were Jewish was allowed to leave unless they were a part of a work detail. When the Germans inventoried the people, they offered Malka and Abram the opportunity to take their family and move from among the "undesirables" to a better neighborhood. Abram insisted that his family be allowed to stay. He told the Germans it was to protect his home from the undesirables, and prayed the Germans did not realize he meant them. There was nowhere for the Jewish people to live. They were squeezed into the houses to the point of overflowing. Along with people forced to live in the streets, rodents and disease flooded into the neighborhood as well. People died in the streets, their bodies left in the cold, frozen to the roads. During the day, men, women and even children worked to drag the bodies of loved ones into the cemetery, but the ground was too hard to bury them, and the bodies too numerous. After a while, the bodies were left in the streets for people to walk over.

The Jews were sealed into the neighborhood, and inventoried by the Germans as it was converted into a ghetto. Food lines were established to help feed the non-Jewish families, Jews, if they were discovered, were violently pulled out of the food lines by the Germans who kept watch. Often when removed from food lines the Jews were beaten. The Germans took he and Malka's cow, their "contribution" to the German commissary, they said. The German's left the chickens and goats for Abram and

Malka's family but insisted that Abram remove the stalls from the barn, and cut large openings in the North and South ends of the barn, so that the Germans could see at a glance if any Jews were hiding in the barn, and eliminate the problem.

The Germans often made comments about how the Jewish kept others from prospering with their power. They accused the Jews of hoarding wealth, and talked about how it was fine to see them suffer, as true Germans had suffered from Jewish greed. The Germans spoke with such vitriol and hatred, it seemed they truly believed that the Jewish were responsible for the inflated prices of goods, that German low-paying jobs were the fault of the Jews with high paying jobs.

The penalties for helping the Jewish were quite severe. Anyone not Jewish caught sharing food with the Jewish were summarily executed. A non-Jewish family getting caught giving shelter to Jewish personnel would cause the execution of the entire family. It seemed almost petty in comparison to death for hiding people, but goods such as toilet paper and soap were rationed as a method of discouraging people from hiding Jews. The careful inventory and the severe penalties made it very difficult for Abram to help anyone outside his family. But he knew he had to figure out how he could help. This destruction of the Jewish people hurt his soul.

Everyone coming or going had to show identification to come or leave. Unless they were going on a work detail, the Jews were not permitted to leave the ghetto. Not long after the Germans funneled large numbers of Jews into the neighborhood, the Jews were given an easier, more visible method of identification. The Germans distributed yellow stars of David to the Jews. The Jews were instructed to sew them onto their clothes for easy identification. The Jewish were instructed that they must

always wear the star. Failure to do so would result in harsh consequences. Everyone in the ghetto had seen what harsh consequences meant in terms of the curfew, and they were too afraid to refuse the stars.

People who wore the yellow Star of David on their sleeves were easy to spot from a distance, and the visibility of the star made it very hard for anyone wearing it to escape. A few Jewish people did try to escape early on in their internment but were discouraged from trying after the first few were severely beaten for trying to leave.

The German treatment of the Jews became slowly worse but worse, their own native Polish soldiers began to mimic the German treatment of the Jews. It was harsh, and often deadly treatment.

As the Germans and the Poles inventoried people, checking identification, making lists of Jews in town, counting them, they often talked about a coming solution. A solution to what? The Jews were unsure, it sounded ominous though. The optimistic among them hoped it was a solution to the overcrowded ghettos, but the pessimists reminded them that it seemed unlikely given all they had endured at the hands of the Germans. The Jews tried to hide when the Germans came around with their lists and counting.

The Germans began pressing the young, strong Jews who were not in hiding into service. Some of them helped build railroads and put-up power poles and lines, some worked in German strongholds, tending gardens and orchards and dogs. Often, those people returned speaking about watching the Germans torture Jews in several cruel and imaginative ways, one example that was particularly gruesome was the tale of throwing disabled or sick Jews into cages with hungry dogs for sport. Most people

thought the stories were false, ridiculous. Abram, however, took them seriously, always thinking of the story of Jabez.

An additional hardship for the Jewish people presented itself after the neighborhood was sealed. The Jews no longer had access to hospitals. There were two doctors who lived in the neighborhood, who could no longer go to work. Both felt God laid it upon their hearts to help people. Unable to go to their practices, each doctor used their house as a makeshift hospital.

Aaron, the obstetrician who lived across the street from Malka and Abram, ran a maternity ward. He saw to pregnant women's prenatal care, cared for the women through birth, and kept them in his house with their newborn babies as long as he could, allowing them to convalesce until he had to make room for new patients. It was his mission to give the babies their best chance at life and thriving. He understood once he turned them onto the street, the overcrowding and exposure lowered the babies' chances of survival. It went against his nature to turn them out.

Across the ghetto, Benjamin turned his house into an infirmary. His job was harder. He also had limited space. It was necessary for him to triage the ill and injured who came to him for care. If he thought he could help a person, he took them in and gave them care, but because space, medications, and materials for bandages were scarce, he turned away those he knew he could not help. He felt bad for those he sent away, but the supplies were needed for the living, not the dead that simply had not died yet. Neither doctor had ideal circumstances, but it was something at least.

Seeing the doctors use their homes to help, Abram thought he could do no less, but how? The Doctors were already labeled as Jewish, they would not be executed for

helping. But he and Malka had a large house, they could house more people than just their family. How to hide them? It would, he realized, be even more difficult to hide a person who had been inventoried by the Germans. The Germans did a headcount each day, and when there were missing Jews, they conducted a house to house search. Sometimes they did random searches of houses as well, just to keep people off balance. Abram wept every time he saw a search followed by gunshots. Another person hiding was found and executed.

Did they inventory the dead on the street each day? Or did they simply inventory, count, and deduce those missing were dead? Was it possible to save the inventoried? Abram did not know.

Chapter 6

Abram's family was able to hide in plain sight, just as he and his wife planned. Their identification held up to scrutiny when the Germans knocked on the door, looking for the Jews. Because the family had chosen a German surname as their Gentile name, the Germans saw their family as a sort of ally. In fact, unless there was a missing Jew, often the Germans would skip their house on random searches. Not always, but often. Abram realized in choosing a German name, God had provided him the opportunity to help others he had been searching for. The Germans so often declined to search their house he could help those people who had escaped being inventoried, allowing unregistered families with small children to live in his house.

His work as a clockmaker meant he was skilled at woodworking and building cunning hidden latches and doors. Doing it in a house simply meant adjusting his skills to a larger scale. The Germans had unwittingly provided him with the necessary wood to build hiding spaces in the house with their directions for his barn. By trying to deny the Jews in the ghetto with a hiding place, they had provided a safer, warmer, more discreet hiding place.

Abram used his skill set to build false walls and cubbies for people to hide in, spaces to conceal the extra people he allowed to live in his house. Those cunningly hidden doors escaped notice, the false walls often in the back of a closet, helped when the Germans did decide to search their house.

Once the hiding cubbies were built, Abram began searching for unregistered people. Especially families or women with small children. Abram longed to help more, but he did what he could. The numbers of extra people in his house grew, slowly, methodically.

Bringing in the extra people was not easy. Always, the family lived under the threat of someone who knew who they were before Poland was invaded reporting them, but most of the Jewish who knew them from before the war seemed to understand what Abram was doing. They desperately wanted the children to have a chance. It also helped that Malka and Abram, at great risk to all in their household, shared eggs and milk with the neighbors. It was this willingness to both save as many children as they could, and share food that kept neighbors who knew their family from reporting them as Jews to the Germans. Their eggs and milk kept many people in the ghetto from starvation.

Resources were tight with so many people in the house, especially with the rationing. Malka cut up washable rags to use as toilet paper and made soap from goat's milk and used the eggs and milk to really stretch the food and keep people clean. Keeping people clean was a necessity with so many people in the house! The smell of unwashed bodies would be a tip-off during a search by the Germans. Keeping people fed was also key. People who were hungry were irritable, and when you, of necessity kept people cooped up, they were unable to go outside, living in constant fear, and hiding in small cubbies every time there was a knock at the door, anything that reduced irritability was important. But not every knock on the door was the Germans wanting to search the house. Sometimes sorrow was on the other side of the door, and sometimes the family opened the door to joy.

Chapter 7

Matthew had come to their family in the middle of the night. It had been a miracle in itself that the Germans had not seen him and his boys as they snuck into the neighborhood. Matthew knocked on Malka and Abram's door well after curfew. His feet were dirty and bare, he had walked his shoes into non-existence.

It was an act of desperation for Matthew, knocking on the door. He never would have done it had he been alone, he explained, but his boys were sick, malnourished, and their clothes were threadbare, thin, and they were also close to barefoot. He was a parent who realized his twins needed help. Answering the door, Abram looked into the haunted eyes of the boys, the grieving face of Matthew and knew he could not turn them away, no matter the danger. He opened the door wide and motioned them in before a single word was exchanged. The boys touched his heart.

Integration into the household was slow. Matthew was quiet at first, his children withdrawn. Everyone in the house recognized the sorrow, the pain of loss on their faces and in their actions. But Abram and Malka had suffered loss in their marriage, and understood the best balm for that pain was to talk about it. They knew sorrow, loss, and horror lessened their grip on a man's heart and soul when he spoke about traumatic events, as if the negative emotions were attached to the words that left a speaker's mouth and entered the ears of another human. Over time, with careful questions, and many invitations to talk, Matthew's story spun out.

Matthew had been married to a beautiful woman named Rachel. Friends since childhood, they attended the same synagogue, attended the same school where they shared many classes, they played together, and spent so much time together, it was

obvious to everyone who knew them that they belonged together. Obvious to everyone but Matthew and Rachel that was. Around the age of sixteen, they both tried dating, but Matthew at least realized that he found other girls incompatible. He never realized that he was in love with Rachel, until the day that she proposed to him.

“Look, Matt, I have dated a few other people at this point, and none of them understand me the way you do. None of them fit my personality the way you do. And none of them love me the way you do, or the way I love you. The way I see it, if we don’t marry each other, we will be miserable. So, I want you to marry me.” Matthew hardly knew what to say that day. He left in dumbfounded silence. It was two days later when he accepted his proposal.

“I think you are right. I do love you, and we, being friends, I think we will have a very good marriage. Yes, I will marry you.” And so, without a traditional courtship, Matthew and Rachel had married, just as even their own parents had predicted. Life with Rachel had been wonderful, a true gift from God. Not long after the wedding, Rachel became pregnant. She glowed with joy knowing she carried life inside her, that she held a miracle, proof of God’s existence. Rachel gave birth to the twins, Amos and Asher, just a year after their wedding. Despite their efforts, it took a little over two years for Rachel to get pregnant again.

They had been married just four years, when their daughter was born. They named her Chaya, meaning life, ironic all things considered. Just after Chaya’s birth, the Germans rolled into Poland. Like Abram’s neighborhood, Matthew’s had been subjected to registration, curfews, the hated yellow stars, and had been flooded with Jews from other neighborhoods. Rachel had insisted they bring people from the streets

into their home, even though they had a new baby. She was always that way, generous, giving, loving toward others. In a way, that compassion was what killed her.

The house was full of people, and it was noisy. Always noisy, Matthew explained. Noisy in the day with people talking, arguing at times, and a lot of people in a small space will often do, the coughing and hacking of the ill, the spare bedrooms were filled with the sick. Some of the new people they took in from the streets had nowhere to go when the Germans poured them into the ghetto. Those people told stories about atrocities the German soldiers committed in the neighborhoods they were taken from. Stories about “consolidation” and “clearing” stories that cause fear. That fear caused more arguments, some people insisted the Germans could not do those things to other human beings, some insisted those stories were inappropriate, true or not, and just served to cause fear. Matthew explained he and Rachel had been among those who did not believe in the atrocities.

Particularly upsetting for Matthew and his wife were the stories about the children. One woman claimed to be from a Jewish village in Germany and whispered to Rachel and Matthew that they must hide the twins. She claimed the Germans had a doctor who was very interested in twins. He liked experimenting on them, cruel, tortuous, often deadly experiments. Her stories frightened Rachel. She still did not believe they could be true, but Matthew explained that sometimes even the things you did not believe could work their way into your heart and cause anxiety and fear.

The house was noisy at night, snoring, and coughing, and quiet sobs, amplified by the pure number of voices sharing sobs in the dark. There were the sharp voices of parents insisting their children sleep, the soothing sounds of lullabies, and occasionally

the sounds of husbands and wives sharing intimate moments. Several members of the work details lived in his house, the thump of their boots coming in just before curfew added to the noise. But the thumping of boots coming in were always welcome sounds. The thumps of boots from the work detail coming in meant the work detail was alive to come back. The thumps of the boots of the work detail, just like many of the other sounds, were the sounds of life.

Matthew and Rachel usually did not mind the noise, it was the noise of life, the sounds of families, but occasionally they, and others in their house, needed to escape it. It was winter, and the porch was cold, but it was a haven from the noise, from one another, for many of the people in the house. There was noise outside, Jews and soldiers on the streets, but the noise was somehow crystalized, broken and fell from the air in sharp shards, became lost in the cold air, seemed somehow less intrusive, less loud. There was an understanding on the porch, there were no raised voices, talk only when invited. The porch was an acceptable area to be outside after curfew.

It was a Tuesday. As usual, the Germans had worked the Jews until just before curfew. Matthew and the rest of the detail were covered in dirt, mud and sweat from the day's work. They had been forced to dig an enormous pit that day, the snow melting into the dirt as they dug, made the digging hot, sweaty, filthy work for the day, and Matthew needed a shower. He kissed his wife and went upstairs. He was luxuriating in the shower, allowing the hot water to unknot his muscles when he heard it.

As usual, the house had been filled with people, and noise. Chaya was fussy. She had been colicky for the last few weeks. Rachel had stepped out to comfort the baby, to get fresh air, and away from the noise of the people crowding their once

spacious home. She had been sitting on the steps in front of the house, nursing Chaya. She sat on the bottom step, her back against the next higher step, her feet were in the ground in front of the porch. It was a posture she had used many times before. Rachel lost track, and time slipped past curfew while she was nursing.

There was no warning shout, no command to get all the way on the porch and off the road. The German who spotted her opened fire, laughing hysterically as he fired. He employed a method referred to as “spray and pray”. The soldier's bullets peppered both Rachel and Chaya. The one comfort Matthew had was that his wife and baby expired quickly. His own sobs joined those of the other people in his house that night. Rachel had been so kind and loved among the people in his house.

The next day, there was a round up, the Germans ordered all the Jews into a singular meeting place. The Germans opened fire as the Jews ran to the meeting place. Bodies of all ages lay in the street, causing others to fall in their panicked run to the trucks the Germans had parked in the middle of the Ghetto. Once they were assembled, the old people were loaded onto the trucks. Matthew did not explain what a round-up was, or where he suspected the elderly had gone, only that they did not come home again. The omission was ominous, but no one pressed him for the information. Perhaps they thought he was entitled to some privacy, perhaps they just did not want to know.

After the death of his wife and child, and then the round up, Matthew started to believe the stories from the people who flooded their neighborhood. He began to believe the Germans may have a cruel doctor who could be interested in his twins. This new belief made him realize he needed to leave, to take his twins with him, to keep them away from the Germans. It had to be done, if for no other reason than to keep a

piece of Rachel in the world. Matthew explained that no matter the cost, he felt the need to preserve Rachel's light and kindness, that light and kindness she had already taught the boys. He was so concerned for the safety of his boys; he did not have time to grieve any longer. More immediate concerns took the place of grief in his life.

He and the twins left silently one cloudy night. They crept out the back door of his house, alert for the sounds of sentries, who lived to enforce the curfew with deadly consequences. He and the boys stole away into the night. They had nowhere to go, no plan, and nowhere to run away to. With winter setting in, the weather was getting cold and wet. As a result, the boys were cold, wet, and being so young, they only had so much stamina. Matthew admitted that running in fear with no plan was a poor idea, he just felt that he had no other choices.

After he and the boys had been on the run for a few months, hiding from Germans, from Polish soldiers, from marauders in the roads, never knowing who they could trust, sleeping in hay lofts, stealing what little food they could, one of the boys got sick. Matthew admitted that he felt guilty because he worried as much about his son's hacking cough drawing the attention of the Germans as he did about finding care for his son.

Matthew explained that during their time on the run, he lost faith, neglected prayer, wondered why God had left him, left his family, left his community. He blamed God for his son's illness and his own response to it. Matthew realized his son needed care, that the remnants of his family needed a place to go where the kids could feel safe, warm, and he could actually attend to their needs, instead of pushing them to exhaustion to outrun the Germans and avoid capture.

One night they were hiding in the hollow of a large tree when Matthew saw the Germans drop off a working crew one evening. He knew the work group were Jews of course and thought he would try in the ghetto to get food. He knew the chances were small. It was the goats and chickens, signs that there might be food to share in the house, the possibility of food for his boys who were rail thin and developing the distended stomachs of starvation that gave him the courage to knock.

Matthew explained his thought process as he knocked, that if the owners of the house reported them, he and his boys would join his wife and daughter quickly, rather than slowly starving to death. He felt the quick death would be more merciful for his boys.

It was a miracle that they knocked on Malka and Abram's door. That knock changed Matthew, Amos and Asher's lives. It renewed Matthew's faith. It also changes Abram and Malka's life. And it changed Leah's life.

Chapter 8

After Michael and his sons arrived, Leah's hard exterior began to soften. The lost, sad look in the boy's eyes put a weight on her heart. In order to lift that weight, she worked with the boys, teaching them to play, laugh, and feel joy once more. Because she had been studying to be a nurse, she had some medical expertise, and was able to care for Asher, recognizing that he had pneumonia, she was able to apply treatments to soothe his symptoms and aid in his getting well. Leah did not realize that working with the twins relieved some of the pressure Matthew had put on himself, giving Matthew the space he needed to grieve. He did not always have to put up a brave front for his boys.

With regular if limited access to food, Amos and Asher put on weight little by little over months, their distended bellies, so distinct to children starving to death, receded. Clean, their cheeks grew less sallow, their curly dark blond hair gained a clean glow, and the dark circles under their eyes receded. In a few months' time, the boys looked much healthier.

The boys, true of young children, rebounded from their losses quickly. They had not had time to grieve for their mother during the cold, tired nights of endless walking. Now that they had food, and the luxury of a measure of safety, they found tears for their mother. They told simple stories about their mother. Soon those stories brought smiles of fond remembrance rather than tears of loss. The haunted look in their faces left as the memory of the running and hiding faded. Those memories returned to them in nightmares for the rest of their lives, as most traumatic things do, but they no longer haunted the thoughts of every waking moment in their day-to-day lives.

Matthew watched Leah teach his boys to read, to write, and to pray. He realized, watching her pray with the boys, he had neglected his faith. Here there was so much to

be thankful for. God had delivered him and his sons to this safe haven. He realized he had been right to blame God for his son's illness, but wrong to think it had not been a blessing and a directive for him. If it had not been for Asher's illness, he may have never had the courage to knock on Malka and Abram's door.

Though his children told stories about their mother, they were few, and the same ones were repeated over and over again. They knew so little of her, had so little chance to get to know her. That lack of knowledge was a point of sadness for Matthew. He wished they had had the chance to really get to know her. Matthew felt they were robbed in the loss of their mother. But again, God provided an opportunity for his boys to know their mother and helped preserve the bonds of family.

Leah seemed to understand Matthew's desire for the boys to remember their mother. Each night after dinner, Leah sat with Matthew and the boys, asking Matthew many questions about Rachel every night. Leah's questions allowed Matthew to tell his boys stories about their mother, keeping her alive in their hearts and minds. Mercifully, they did not witness her death, and it was a somewhat abstract idea to them. More importantly, Leah's questions slowly erased the images of her death from Matthew's mind, filling instead with vibrant memories of his time with her. One day his grief was just absent, his mind filled with joy, his heart with gratitude, both for the time God had granted him with his wife, and for Leah, removing the shadow of Rachel's death over those memories.

As time progressed, the gratitude Matthew felt for Leah grew in scope and intensity. He looked forward to the moments he spent with her every day. He even orchestrated reasons to spend additional time with her every day, helping with her

chores, consulting her about decisions to be made about the boys. He found that he treasured every word they shared and could not wait to talk to her. He felt warm affection for her, seeing how she cared for his boys, ensuring they knew all about their mother. He recognized that she had been instrumental in allowing him to process his feelings and release his grief. He realized he was more than just infatuated with her, that he was in fact, choosing to love her.

It was a Wednesday when he told her he loved her. It was a new thing for him, realizing that he loved a woman, and being able to see, name and embrace the emotion. She blushing told him that she returned his feelings.

Matthew was elated that she loved him. He knew that traditionally her family would expect a long courtship, but he also understood that time was not promised to them. He wanted to marry Leah, and he wanted to do it soon. Matthew spoke to Abram on Thursday.

“Abram, I am beyond grateful for all you, and your family has done for me and my boys. We were broken when we came to you, you clothed us, sheltered us, restored my faith, and gave us time to heal. Tonight, in my prayers, I will thank God for your family and your kindness.” He took a deep breath, “I hope that tonight I can also thank God for the added blessing of permission to join your family. Abram, I’d like your permission to marry Leah.”

Abram’s eyes twinkled, he had seen this coming, and in fact wondered why it had taken so long. He cracked a smile, “Have you spoken to her? do you know how she feels about you?”

“We have exchanged words of love, but we have not spoken of marriage. I wanted your approval first. I do not know how she will feel about marrying a man who has been married, who already has children. But it would be a sin against my heart not to ask.”

“You have my permission, go and ask her.”

Chapter 9

When the Germans first sealed the neighborhood, the perimeter was guarded by the German sentries. But soon, the Germans used Jewish labor to erect a fence around the ghetto. To enter or leave a person was either Jewish and on a work detail or had a gentile identification. Because he remembered the story of Jabez, Abram had planned ahead, and found a thin protection for his family. He and his boys were able to work outside the neighborhood, in a factory, where they made a decent wage. His family was allowed to use the food lines, and used his salary to augment the milk and eggs the goats and chickens provided.

One day, just after the fences were erected, with no warning, the Germans came door to door, checking identification, looking for the identifying J. When the Germans found anyone in a house with Jewish identification, they swiftly searched for, and ruthlessly removed any firearms in Jewish possession. Firearms, the German and Polish officers assured one another, would allow the Jews to fight back, and that would endanger the agenda of their glorious leader. It was during that raid He and Malka realized their identification was not foolproof protection against the aggression handed out by the Germans.

That day, as Abram and Malka watched the Germans tear through their house, breaking the china and crystal they had received as a wedding gift giving a reason of “checking the backs of the cabinets for hidden firearms the Jews could find and use” they found out that the soldiers also looted jewelry, money, and valuables, from all the people in the ghetto, not just those they thought were Jewish.

The Germans stormed through their house, looting, flipping mattresses, scattering clothes, breaking dishes. They beat on the walls, trying to find hidey holes,

hollow walls, trying to punch holes in the walls. They declared that if the family was hiding any filthy Jews they would be found, and executions would follow. Whether by luck, design or Germans who descended from the view all the Jewish must die, no one noticed the slight differences of color in the backs of the closets where Abram had built compartments for people to hide in, or if they did notice, they did not feel compelled to investigate further.

Abram realized he and Malka were very lucky the Germans did not find the cubbies and crawl spaces filled with people, with children. He knew he had built and insulated the cubbies very well, so that knocking on the walls would not reveal them, but the lack of curiosity of the Germans was also a blessing. Additionally, a part of hiding was the people's ability to be silent during the search. It was a blessing they were able to avoid detection. He thanked God for the blessing.

The Germans looted things they thought were of value from Abram and Malka's house. There seemed to be no standard, and the soldiers always seemed to find something new to take each time they came. During the first tossing of their house, when they were searching for guns, they found some money Abram and Malka had been stockpiling and took it. They explained that the Third Reich needed funding, and that with bread lines to provide for them, they would never miss the money. The Soldiers attitude seemed to be that no one would know, or care if they looted a Christian, or gentile house from time to time? Abram knew it was yet another blessing that they had not found all the money, yet the loss was a setback. After that visit, Abram was apprehensive every time there was a knock at the door.

Thankfully they had not found the money from the sale of Abram's business. Abram and Malka realized they needed to hide their saved money more creatively. The goal to get their family out was growing increasingly urgent, having the money found and taken delayed that goal. They were desperate to get their family out of the ghetto, out of Poland, and away from this terrible persecution of their people. The slaughter around them weighed on their hearts.

Malka and Abram noticed that when they looted, the Germans left clothes alone. The clothes were plain, country clothes, and the Germans found them to be of little value. In fact, every time members of Abram's family were near the Germans, the Germans seldom failed to comment about how ugly and unfashionable their clothing was. Malka hypothesized that money and valuables hidden in their clothes might be safe. After discussing the idea with her husband, Malka sewed money and valuables into the hems of their clothes, sewed money into hidden pockets, and inside the folded, stitched leather of their belts.

Abram nervously paced the hallway upstairs at night, floorboards softly squeaking even as the thick carpet muffled his steps. He thought about how much money they had amassed. He did not begrudge anyone they helped, or the money they spent on food, but it did slow their saving. He worried about being found out. He worried the families hiding in their house would be discovered, during a raid, and those families would be dragged into the street and executed.

It was worse than that though. He knew that if the hiding families were found, not only were the lives of the hiding families forfeit, but possibly he and Malka's, and their children and grandchildren's lives as well. He was not afraid to die, but he was terrified

for his children and grandchildren. He could not change what he did. It was morally right to protect the families. He felt that God had laid the responsibility on his heart, but it was still a concern. Most of all, Abram knew the time to escape was narrowing.

Chapter 10

The Germans continued to liquidate other ghettos, bringing more Jews into Malka and Abram's neighborhood. The Jewish houses were packed with people, the streets were full of more poor, destitute Jews who could not find room in overflowing houses. It hurt Abram to turn them away, but to protect the people who were in his house, he had to.

Even though he turned them away, he and Malka tried to help the other Jews in town, and on the streets. When they could do so without being caught, Malka delivered milk to the makeshift maternity ward Aaron ran, to help feed babies whose mothers were too malnourished to make milk, and eggs to the infirmary to help feed the sick who needed to regain strength. They pretended not to notice when people relegated to the street "stole" eggs out from under the chickens. It was this generosity that kept neighbors from reporting them to the authorities during the roundups of Jews in the neighborhoods.

Because the ghetto was small, and there were rumors that the Jewish population would eventually be moved to Krakow before heading to Treblinka or Auschwitz, there were not many guards in the ghetto. Before long there was a slit in the fence where some Jews were able to slip out, or, when desperate and looking for food like Matthew had been, slip into the ghetto. Those that slipped in were often referred to Abram and Malka's house, since they were unregistered. Especially if they had children.

The people referred to their home usually came at night knocking softly on the back door. Even though the house was packed to near overflowing, Abram almost never turned anyone away when they came in those circumstances. But those people

ran a risk when they chose to knock. If the Germans found them, it had harsh consequences.

There was a hard banging on the front door one night, The people in hiding scattered to their hiding places, and Abram answered the door expecting a raid. As expected, there was a German Soldier on the other side of the door. What Abram did not expect was the man the German held by his collar. The man looked thin to the point of starving and weak. He held a small child in his arms, his threadbare clothing marked with the Star of David.

“This filthy thing was attempting to reach your back door. We thought he might be trying to rob you. We wanted you to witness as we protect you from this thievery,” the soldier spoke clearly, slowly, and boldly. The man’s eyes pleaded with Abram. Abram’s mind raced, there was nothing he could do for the man without jeopardizing the people in his house. The Soldier drug the man down the stairs. The man fell, but instead of trying to catch himself, he twisted to protect the child from the impact. The Soldier took aim, and before he could chamber a round, Abram made a split-second decision.

Praying for strength, he slammed the door behind him and strode angrily onto the porch. He did not have to fake the anger; he was filled with a righteous anger for the German soldiers’ treatment of his people. He moved to the man and roughly grabbed the child and kicked the man in the chest.

“You unwashed, godless bastard, why do you have my granddaughter?” Abram’s eyes sought those of the man on the ground, doing his best to mask his compassion and regret. He knew he was sentencing the man to death, but there was nothing he could do to save the man. He watched the face of the man on the ground, seeing if he

would go along with the ruse. Abram knew it was a big risk. If the man argued with him or tried to reclaim the child, they could all three die right now.

The man on the ground gave an almost imperceptible nod, he knew the choice Abram was making. The man gave a small, sad smile. He knew his daughter would be safe in his absence.

Abram looked at the German, "Not in front of my granddaughter if you please. She has already been frightened enough by this abduction attempt. She does not need to be exposed to this violence as well," It was easy to sell, the little girl had been frightened and wailing since being awakened by the man falling.

The German nodded, "Should I wait for your return?"

"No, I trust you to do what you think is proper in this regard." Abram walked inside, with the little girl clutched against his chest, closed the door, and collapsed as he heard the shot he knew ended the life of the man he could not save. That night he sobbed until there were no tears left in him.

Chapter 11

Abram stood from his prayer of Thanksgiving. The wedding was beautiful. Abram reflected on the joy on his daughter's face, the love reflected in the faces of the happy couple and the guests. These moments of joy were so important, proof that even amid these terrible times, God was still with them. He marveled at God's plans and timing. His wild child, his youngest daughter had found the man who would tame her heart and bring purpose to her life. How strange that they likely never would have met had it not been for the war, the ghetto, and these terrible circumstances.

Of course, when Michael asked her to marry him, Leah had said yes. Abram had known she would. He had watched her carefully with the broken family, watched her mend their hearts. Michael could see that she had no agenda, no jealousy over a lost wife, and she grew to love Amos and Asher as though they were her own. Leah had always said she did not want children, but here she was, taking on two.

Abram watched Leah transform from the self-centered person she was into a loving tender woman. She had matured into a woman who cared for someone else, who put the needs of others before her own. She was no longer resentful of having to live in a house with her parents and siblings, along with a bunch of additional people, but instead was excited to see Matthew and his children every day. Grateful for the closeness their living conditions brought. Beginning to see the house's community as her extended family.

Abram presided over the wedding in the absence of a rabbi. It was a small affair when it was compared to pre-war weddings, but Leah wore her best dress, and the house was decked out with flowers gathered from outside, thankfully it was spring, and flowers were abundant. The entire house was infected with the joy of the wedding, with

the joy of love found among the thorns of bitterness that gripped them all. Yes indeed, Abram thought as he stood, God worked in strange ways.

Now if only he could figure out how to get his new son-in-law and grandchildren gentile identification, they could live in the open as well. If only he could find everyone gentile ID.

Chapter 12

The young man rested against the truck. He removed his cap, looking down to ensure his uniform was clean, his boots shined to a mirror finish. The sun glinted off his golden hair. He sucked in a deep breath, his body shuddering as he released it. His breath curled up, showing white and hot in the crisp cool air. Today he, Hani, would face the terror of the Jews for the first time.

His unit had been called upon to clean out a ghetto, removing the older, more powerful Jews. His commander assured his unit that Jewish power grew as they aged, so it was important to cull the most powerful among them. He hoped no one in his unit would realize he was afraid of the Jews. Everyone said they had some sort of mystic power, what exactly? No one seemed to know, and everyone had different ideas, but even so, it must be true, why else would everyone know it to be so? Perhaps the set of powers they had were so diverse no one could detail them all. Perhaps it was that each person had different powers, and that was why no one knew what the power set was.

It did not matter, Hitler, along with many other people much smarter than he, had explained that the Jews were a problem that must be ended. They explained the Jews were why there was so much scarcity in the world. The Jews were responsible for hungry children. They used their powers to become wealthy while the Germans, the true Germans, were poor, hungry, homeless, destitute. They must be stopped, their wealth shared amongst the people for the good of all. This income disparity must not be allowed to continue, there must be income equality and equitable distribution of the Jewish money and goods. That was why Hitler was working to enact a final solution to the Jewish problem. Once the retches were eradicated, equity would be restored.

His leader rounded the side of the truck, and patted his arm, "I know you are nervous, but just do as you are told, and it will be fine. The Jews are a formidable foe, but we are superior, we are the Arian, and God has foretold our victory." He nodded, "Let's go, it's time to vanquish our foe."

Hani drew himself upright, snapped his arm out at a slight upward angle, fingers together, palm down, "Heil Hitler Sir, let's go." He bounded into the bed of a truck with other soldiers from his unit and held on as it bounced down the road.

When they arrived at the ghetto, Hani and the others jumped down, and began shouting for the Jews to assemble by the trucks. The people ran quickly, but not quickly enough for the team. Several Soldiers began to shoot into the crowd, without really aiming. They hit all sorts of people, men, women, children, some in the leg, some in the stomach and a few in the head. No aid was offered to those who were hit, by the other Jews or the Germans. Hani's fellow soldiers urged him to shoot into the crowd as well. At first, he did, caught up in the excitement and fear of the moment. Before long though, he started to wonder why the Jews did not use their immense power to stop this assault. Hani started to look for powerful Jews working their magic, but instead he was surprised to see frightened expressions on the people's faces. Hani saw the faces of the Jews crumple in pain when bullets impacted their bodies. The doubts he had felt really deepened into a full-fledged question, why? If the Jews were so powerful, why did they allow this to happen?

A young woman of about fourteen ran in front of him, appearing to trip. He looked down in time to see the expression of horror mingled with pain in her face, her blue dress ripped, a stain spreading in the fabric on her abdomen, dark red, a stark contrast.

As he peered into her pleading face, one of his comrades ended her life, crushing her skull with the butt of his rifle. The man looked at Hani, grinning maniacally, "Another great victory!" the man lifted one hand in the air in a salute. Hanev snapped the salute back without thinking. Looking down, Hani stepped back as he noticed a stream of blood was flowing down the street. He did not want blood on his shoes. The entire quelling of the ghetto's population took less than five minutes.

The leader of Hani's unit stepped in front of the assembled Jews, and in a loud voice, instructed everyone present to present identification. Anyone who did not have the J on their identification was free to go. Anyone who had identification marking them as a Jew who did not wear the star would be punished.

Hani's squad moved through the crowd subdued people. They gathered anyone who appeared to be over fifty, and anyone who appeared to be injured or handicapped, not a group next to the trucks. The people who Hani's squad singled out were asked if they were members of a work detail. If they claimed to be, they were given an opportunity to produce papers confirming their status. Members of the isolated group without papers for a work detail were loaded into the empty trucks.

The men from Hani's unit handled the Jews roughly loading them into the trucks, ignoring cries of pain, and snickering at their tears. They laughed and made jokes about the dead and dying on the streets. Some of the soldiers bragged about how many Jews they had killed.

Hani felt queasy, a little sick. He wished it would rain and wash the stench of blood and shit liberated from the bodies that littered the road away. He knew his unit

was doing the right thing, they must be. He just had not expected the Jews to look just like him. Like his grandparents, his siblings, his parents.

His team mounted the trucks they arrived in and rode out of the ghetto behind the trucks full of the older Jews. They headed out into the countryside to the pits their own young had dug just 2 days prior. Haney winced as his unit roughly pushed the elderly Jews from the backs of the trucks into the pits, heedless of causing possible injuries. The people in the pit screamed as their bodies smacked against the bottom, against the bodies of their neighbors and family members, as bones snapped, and joints twisted.

Once all the detainees had been forced into the pit, his fellow soldiers surrounded the pit and started shooting into it. One of his platoon members leaned toward him, "I see you are not shooting; I know they are moving about and that makes them slightly harder to kill, but here is a secret. It doesn't matter if we kill them, or if we only wound them. We will set fire to the pit after we finish killing or wounding most of them. You don't even need to aim, just shoot until you are out of ammo, and incapacitate them. If they cannot get out, they will die either way." He smiles in a way that Hani found off-putting, "And if there are any we didn't incapacitate, as they try to escape, we can shoot them, or push them so they fall back in the fire." His grin sickened Hani.

He desperately argued with himself, His teammates could not be wrong, this must be the answer. He attempted to harden himself against their screams. Perhaps this was the magic of the Jews, they looked so normal, so human, and made you feel sympathy for them. He thought about his young sister, who was dying for want of food. It was the Jews fault; Hitler had assured the country this was the case. His face

hardened, and Hani raised his rifle. He just wished he did not feel so bad for the people in the pit.

He knew this was only the first cleansing of the ghetto, he shivered when he thought about what was planned for the next. Perhaps when they moved all the Jews into Krakow it would be better for them, and better for him.

Chapter 13

Abram and his family were excused from the round up. They neither wore the stars, not did their identification indicate a Jewish name or legacy with the accursed J. The Germans did not even expect them to leave their house during the round-up. Abram and Malka sat at their kitchen table, holding hands tightly, eyes closed, tears flowing from beneath their eyelids, praying for the souls outside. They stayed inside, with the doors shut to protect the people within. The unregistered Jews in the house hunkered in hiding places, trying to be silent as the grave. Abram and Malka's children sat in their bedrooms, and tried to ignore the shouting, screams and shots ringing out.

Shortly after the trucks drove away, the people left behind, both inside the safe haven of Abram and Malka's house, and outside in the streets heard the sharp crack of gunshots in the distance. Every member of the community had prayed that their suspicions were wrong, but when the old people never returned, they understood the meaning of the shots, and suspected the reason for the pit they had been so uneasy about when they dug it.

The members of the community, heads hung in sorrow, started looking through the bodies in the street, cataloging who they lost, moving the bodies to the graveyard. There were too many to bury, but at least the bodies would not litter the streets. There was no escaping the smell. Abram and his sons went out to help with the cleanup. The Germans would think nothing beyond the idea that the bodies created a hazard for his family.

That night, after he had showered away the mud, blood, and stink, he sat to pray and weep for the lost. He wished there were more he could do for his community, more

people he could save. Malka came into the living room and sat next to him on the couch.

“It was a hard day my love, but we survived, as did everyone in our home.”

“We did. But so many were lost. The Germans, they know exactly what they are doing to us. They are taking our past, our legacy, our history from us Malka. How will the young know who and what we are without our legacy? We can only survive if we act as a family in all things. We have to find a way to preserve what legacy we can.”

Abram’s usually happy smile, and sparkling eyes were dulled with sadness. “We cannot be the whole of the legacy.”

Malka agreed with Abram that the children were being robbed of their pasts, the stories about their families, their oral traditions. At least, she thought, they would have their parents. Their parents will be able to share stories of their families, their past glories, and mistakes. But how terrible for them to grow up without grandparents. Neither Malka nor Abram understood that the roundup and wholesale murder of the elders in their community was just the beginning of how the Germans would break their people’s spirits, make them long for death, even while working to survive. To make the Jewish people wonder if their God had forsaken them. Some Jews, who lost everything, would also lose their faith in God. But their understanding grew about a week later.

Chapter 14

Malka had paused to admire the soft pinks and purples of the clouds as she completed the morning chores of gathering eggs and milking the goats. She prayed a prayer of thanks, as she did every morning during this quiet time. Thanks that her family was together and safe. Thanks that she and Abram were able to help some people. She smiled thinking of her son's wisdom. Gabriel had walked into a room where Malka and Abram were having a discussion. Abram had been lamenting that they could not help more people, but there was simply no room for more people in their house, well at least not to hide when the Germans came looking. Gabriel had grabbed his father's hands, asking if Abram knew the parable of the starfish.

"The starfish?" Abram was confused.

"Yes, the starfish. Listen Dad, there was a man, walking along the shoreline, watching the waves crash against the shore. As the waves receded into the ocean, they left behind hundreds of starfish. The man began scooping up starfish on his walk and throwing them back into the ocean. Another man approached, and asked what he was doing. The first man replied, 'I am saving some starfish.' The second man scoffed and said, 'you can never throwback enough to make a difference.' The first man tossed another starfish back into the ocean, and said, 'Maybe not. No one can save them all, but it makes a difference to that starfish, for each starfish I save.' It made a difference to some, not all, but it did to each starfish he threw back. Father, you cannot save them all, but you make a difference for some. That is all you can do."

Abram had pulled Gabriel into a tight hug, whispering, "Then we save what we can, son, we make a difference for those we can. I still lament that we cannot do more, but I can make a difference to those we hide. It has to be enough."

Memory of the conversation warmed Malka, as did knowing that the delivery of eggs and milk to the two makeshift hospitals was another way she and Abram made a difference. The people they fed were more starfish tossed into the ocean. Reaching under another hen, she collected an egg, warm from the body heat of the chicken, stood and deposited it in her basket. It was then she noticed the dust kicking up from an approaching motorcade. The Germans were on the way again. She turned to find Abram standing next to her. "Take the eggs inside Malka, act as normal as possible. Our deliveries will have to wait a while. I will milk the goat this morning and greet the Germans if they come here. Hide the families, especially, hide the children Malka. Go!" His voice was low and urgent.

Abram took the first goat to the milking stand and gave her a bucket of hay. He grabbed the milk pail and settled himself on a stool. He worked methodically, squeezing each teat, starting at the top and working his way down, in turn, emptying the milk sacs of the goat, attentive to the approaching motorcade.

He felt relieved, it was just a motorcade and not the large trucks the Germans took people away in. People who never returned. He released the first goat and led the second to the stand.

The motorcade pulled up across the street. Abram was confused, why did the Germans need the doctor? They had their own German doctors.

A squad of men ran into the house. "At least they don't have rifles with them this time," Abram thought. Perhaps the Germans thought the doctor had some sort of riches they had not taken yet. He noticed one young soldier, tall, blond, with a long straight nose, who seemed to lag behind his peers. The Soldier glanced at Abram; he thought

the young man looked scared. He wondered why a German would be afraid. The Germans had all the power. His fellow Soldiers grabbed him and pulled him into the building with them. He sighed, and returned to milking the goat, until he heard the first scream. High pitched, begging, "No, Oh God Please No!" The voice became a sobbing keening wail. Abram looked up just in time to see something fly from the second-floor window, landing on the ground with a soft splat. Screams and wails broke out in mass and more small objects flew from the windows.

Abram realized with horror the objects in question were the newborn babies. The soldiers were laughing, and yelling out, making bets about who could throw them the furthest. The babies were crying, the women screaming and pleading, the soldiers laughing and jeering. Abram glanced up at the windows, horrified at the rain falling from the windows. He saw the same soldier looking out, not throwing any babies, just standing and looking out the window. Abram released the goat, picked up the bucket, ignoring the other three goats, and turned to take the milk inside. Sitting the pail on the counter, he leaned against the cabinets and closed his eyes, tears slipping from under his closed eyes. He said a prayer for the souls of the lost babies. There was nothing he could do to help them, not without risking everyone in his house. He felt impotent, helpless to stop the Germans.

He realized in that moment the Germans were doing all they could to erase the Jews completely. They had killed the Jewish past, and now they were robbing the Jews of their future, committing infanticide. The Jews were being robbed of all that made life precious.

“Starfish” he whispered, clenching a fist. He knew he could only help those he could hide. If only there was a way to save more.

Chapter 15

Hani stood at the back of the room. He watched his fellow soldiers pulling babies from the arms of their mothers. There was, he observed, no tenderness, no compassion for either mothers or babies. The men laughed at the women's cries, excited by this reckless violence without consequence. The men shoved the women to the ground, kicking them after they fell, in their stomachs, in their heads, blood slinging off the Soldier's boots. They made a sick sport of flinging the babies from the open windows.

When the soldiers could not separate a mother and child, often the mother went out the window with the baby. It made little difference, they told one another, sooner or later the Jews would all die in the final solution. The point of coming here was to get the relatively healthy strong women back on the work force. Remove the babies, and you remove the reasons not to work. They compared it to curing an illness, except those who got sick were killed outright. In fact, Hani was aware that another squad had been dispatched to the other doctor's house to remove the sick and injured, those people were no good to the Reich either.

The curtains struck Hani oddly, white, light in the breeze, fluttering in an impossibly innocent way, silent witnesses to this murder. As the slaughter continued, they were spattered with red. He could not watch, he moved to a window and looked out. Across the road there was an older gentleman milking a goat. He looked up briefly, and Hani thought for a moment he saw an emotion cross the man's face that matched his own feelings about the matter. The man collected his bucket of milk and went into his house, back straight, head high.

Hani knew, everyone knew these children must be disposed of. His commander had assured him that though they may look human, they were in fact Satan's spawn.

These babies would be capable of incredible dark magic if they were allowed to grow into adulthood. But the babies, Hani thought they looked just like his nieces and nephews. Small, helpless, harmless, suckling at the breasts of their mothers. Hani felt sick. He reminded himself the Fuhrer could not be wrong. These people, no, he thought roughly, not people, these creatures must be eliminated.

Hani thought about his training, and remembered this human-like appearance was the danger. The Jews used it to elicit sympathy, to convince you they were human. His training had warned him it would be this way, he just had not realized it would be so effective. No matter his training, he could not bring himself to throw babies out the windows.

A small piece of his mind protested, rebelled against his training. That corner of his mind said it was all too real to be an act. He noticed that the Jewish women looked as though they were starving, with stick arms and legs devoid of muscle. The women were dressed in rags. Hani did not understand. How were these women responsible for the inflation that drove up prices? How could he blame these families for his sister's starvation, when they looked as though they might need food even more than his family. If they had magic, why didn't they use it to stop the slaughter of their children? Hani knew what he had been taught about the Jews, but what he saw here did not support that teaching. If the Jews were the reason for the increased prices, the decreased buying power, the terrible economy that Hitler used to whip people into a frenzy about the Jewish problem, why didn't those issues end when the Jews were trapped in the ghettos? They had been stripped of their economic power. Hani closed his mind to the

doubts he felt, but no matter what he had been taught, the first seed of doubt planted itself firmly in his mind.

Chapter 16

"They are killing our future, and our past, killing the old and the young," Abram said. "Who are we without a future or a past?" He sighed, "We are nobody, nothing. We are being exterminated, ruthlessly, completely."

"Starfish, my love" Malka said. The word had become a reminder that though they could not help everyone, they could help some.

"I have been thinking about starfish Malka, and about Jabez, and our lesson from her. I don't think we can afford for our whole family to leave at once. I think we need to send the children away; you must go with them to be safe, but I am going to stay, fight against this extermination in my own quiet way, try to stop the reckless slaughter of the babies, and throw back as many starfish as I can."

"We can send the children away my love, but you stay, I stay."

"If I get caught, I am likely to die, I want you to leave. Our family needs you"

"And I need you. I am staying, if we get the children out, we have learned what we must from Jabez, and our line will continue. And as you said, the whole of the Jewish people are our family. How can we do less?" Abram embraced his wife, praying for her safety. He also prayed that between the two of them they could find a way to help more people. His heart was sore from grief for those poor babies. Starfish for whom he could do nothing.

As he so often does, God answered his prayers, if not in the way that Abram would have expected. An enormous opportunity that presented itself about a month later. Though the Germans used the Jewish people for a large portion of their workforce, there were a few jobs they did not trust the Jews to do. The Germans were recruiting people to work in those sensitive areas.

The Germans who guarded the ghetto indicated to upper leadership that Abram and Malka were trustworthy “real” Germans. The administrators for the area approached Malka, knocking on the door while Abram was at work, asking her to work in the records office creating identification. The fact she was asked, and not conscripted indicated that the Germans believed she, and her family were not only not Jews, but also trustworthy. When presented with the offer, her first thought was that she could bring home her salary and add it to the saved money they had hidden to get the children out. She indicated that she was interested in the job, but she needed to discuss it with her husband.

She presented the idea to him once he got home that night. While Abram agreed that the extra income would be helpful in getting the children out, he was more excited about a different aspect of Malka taking the job.

“Malka, that is wonderful!” Abram beamed the first real smile she had seen in days on his handsome face. “Oh, what an opportunity! So many of the families who live here with us, they are, as of yet, unfound, and unregistered.”

“That is true, but” Malka faltered, unsure where her husband’s mind had gone.

“Malka, did it ever occur to you that our family is very small?”

“Our family was what we could support Abram,” Malka frowned, “You have never expressed dissatisfaction before.” She smiled, “Though our family has grown recently, new grandchildren are wonderful,” her face softened thinking of Leah’s new family, “Oh, wait, is that what you mean Abram?” Malka said, then gasped, “Oh maybe we can get identification for Michael and the boys! Oh, you are right, that would be so wonderful, to no longer need to hide them.”

“That is true my love, but it is so much bigger than that. Malka, we can grow our family, you get identification for our additional daughters and sons, their husbands and wives and children.” All the families Abram took in had children, “it would take time and patience, but we could legitimize the families here. We could all rest easier if we did not have to worry about hiding everything there is a knock at the door.” Malka began to see the possibilities of what Abram was proposing.

““You mean, all the families we took in? We...adopt them? And then send them away?” She could see the possibilities. “They too can hide in plain sight with us, we can say they came in from other places to be together with us during this time of privation.”

“Yes, exactly! That is our legacy, we move out as many families as we can.”

“Where do we send them? The whole of the continent seems to be affected by the war. The Germans are rolling over all the countries we considered sending them to.”

“America Malka, we send them to America. They are free to be Jewish there and are beyond the reach of the Germans.”

“That is so far away Abram. Will we ever see them again if we send them so far?”

“Will they live if they stay? Can we guarantee that?” Malka shook her head, the possibilities were bittersweet, they could protect more starfish, possibly save more, they just had to be willing to let go.

Malka accepted the position. Her job allowed her to provide gentile identification to the families in her home over time. Some of the families shared the name Fischer with Abram and Malka, as they chose to “adopt” sons. When Abram and Malka adopted men, their entire families took the Fischer name. When they adopted daughters, the unmarried ones took the name Fischer, the married took their husbands’ newly acquired

gentile names. Once they had their new identification, often the family staged an arrival. After arriving, the “new” family could live in the open.

Single men and women always took the Fisher name, but before long, that became difficult. How many children would the Germans believe Abram and Malka had? When would the Germans take notice? Would the Germans believe some of them were nieces and nephews? And how many orphaned children could each family take? To avoid drawing notice, the single people started hiding again.

Chapter 17

Life in the Fischer house had simultaneously gotten easier, and harder as more of the people in the house got identification. Easier in the sense that not as many people had to hide. And when the Germans came though looking for possible hiding people, having so many in the house made it more unlikely. Abram was also able to get some of their adopted sons jobs in the factory, so they were able to amas more money to send families away. Abram thought every night about when he could start sending his children away.

However, living with so many small children in the house was worrisome. Abram's new concern was always, when would the Germans say something? How long before they had serious questions? Many of the additions to their family were too close in age if the Germans cared to look too closely, though Malka tried to spread out their fabricated dates of birth on their identification. Abram thought long about a possible solution, a way to legitimize more of the children in the house if the Germans started asking questions. How far could they push this narrative that all the children in the house were their grandchildren? How believable was the idea that the married families had produced all the "grandchildren" in their house?

The girl Abram had taken from the man on the porch was far from the first, or the last orphaned child he and his wife had found and taken in, and the number of children was disproportionate to the married couples in the house. When the German trucks came to take away the children too young to work, several parents hid their children. Like the elders, the truck pulled out, and the community heard shots in the distance. Many of those parents found creative ways to send their children to the Fischer household, hoping that Abram and Malka would be able to protect them, as they had

many others. The disproportionate number of children would get worse if he figured out a way to save the babies across the street before another slaughter took place. And the children being disproportionate to the married couples was only one problem Abram faced. Another was how to get the children out. He certainly could not send the children to America alone.

Abram prayed for a solution to the problem with the extra children and listened closely for the guiding voice of God. While he prayed, thoughts of Leah's romance and marriage crowded his mind. Abram knew that once Michael married his daughter, with fresh identification Michael, Asher, and Amos were as safe as he could make them until he sent them away. They had taken the little girl from the incident on the porch as well. She had been about the same age as Michael's lost daughter, and he was happy to raise the little girl. But that was not an answer unless he wanted to seriously consider arranged marriages amongst the single people in his house. The longer he thought about it, the more it seemed like that may be the correct answer, after all the Jewish people had a long tradition of using a matchmaker and having arranged marriages. The newly married couples could adopt the orphaned children, providing them with a family network, support, and a link to their family legacies. Why can't that be the solution, he thought. He even had an idea where to start.

Chapter 18

Abram approached Gabriel about this idea. Abram talked to his son about the idea of possibly marrying the young woman named Batya who was widowed just over a year before the war. Abram shared that he thought there was a chance for love to bloom between Gabriel and Batya.

Batya and her husband had lived in the same small town as Abram's family since early childhood. Gabriel, Batya and her husband, Eldad attended school together, and had always shared a tight bond of friendship. Gabriel stood as Eldad's best man at the wedding. He had wept with joy for the happy couple on their wedding day and was a member of the team that raised Eldad's chair during their wedding celebration.

Eldad had been a talented farrier, believed to be able to sooth even the most cantankerous horses with his gentle touch and soft voice. Unfortunately, after three years of marriage, Eldad met the horse he could not calm. Or perhaps he simply did not have time to soothe the horse. He had been in a barn stall, shoeing a horse when it was startled by a gunshot. The horse's owner found a weasel among his chickens, and dispatched it, never dreaming his actions would cause a death beyond that of the weasel. The horse attempted to rear, knocking Eldad into a barn wall; he fell. The horse began to kick, striking Eldad's head with a hoof, knocking him unconscious, and then, trying to get away, trampled the farrier to death. The horse's owner came to check on the shoeing process, thinking Eldad had taken much longer than usual, but found him too late.

Batya and Eldad had a happy marriage, but the blessings of children had never materialized for them. They had tried to have children, after all, they honored God first in their marriage, and the first of the commandments was to be fruitful and multiply, but

children just never came. They had not been concerned, as Betya and Eldad saw it, they had a lifetime ahead of them to have children. They did not think their married adventure would be over after only three years.

Gabriel had returned home from college with his new law degree in hand just before Eldad's death. Just as he had hoisted Eldad's chair on his wedding day, he was among the pallbearers hoisting Eldad's casket for his funeral. He mourned for the loss of one friend and shared the grief of another. He put his dreams of being a lawyer in the big city on hold, because he felt he was needed here.

Gabriel was there for Batya through her grieving process. After working in the town's small legal office, he went to her house every day after work for a few hours. She leaned on him heavily to help with the chores her husband would generally do. She spoke to Gabriel at length about the plans she and Eldad had made as she had lain in bed with her husband at night, thinking and planning for the future until the sun cast dim light across the sky. She shared the names they had planned on for their never realized children with Gabriel. She sobbed, laughed, glowed with the love she held in her heart for her husband. Gabriel just listened as she talked. Many things she shared he already knew. They had grown up together after all, but he knew she needed to talk. As she talked, the more she talked, she healed.

Then, the war came. He insisted she, like his family, not register as a Jew when registration was forced on the people of their village. Gabriel convinced his parents to get her gentile identification along with the rest of their family, and that she be among the first to live with them, insisting on protecting his friend from the persecution coming from the Germans.

Because Abram and Malka had ordered new identification for their family before telling the children their plan, her identification came later than the rest of the family's. Before it came, she hid in alcoves in the house during the first few sweeps of Germans through the house looking for wayward, hidden Jews. Once she had her identification, she shared with the family how frightening it was to hide in the cubbies. It was hot, closed quarters and uncomfortable. She said she was afraid to make any noise, and sweat rolled down her face, back and neck from the combination of fear and heat. The sound of fists beating on the wall made her swallow screams of fear and stifle her cries.

Abram had also worried during each sweep that she would be found. After her long association with his family, she was like a daughter to him already. Her descriptions of hiding made Abram realize that while hiding worked, it was not ideal. It also made him realize how precarious the position was for all those who were hiding. He breathed a sigh of relief when her identification had finally come.

But now, he thought he could protect her further. Marriage would add another layer of protection to what the family already afforded to Batya. After watching Leah find love and seeing the potential for joy between Gabriel and Batya, he knew they were a perfect test bed. He suspected that Gabriel was already in love but kept silent out of respect. He pitched it to the couple, stressing the need to keep Batya safe, and legitimizing her residence in the house and her adoption of the gentile name. Gabriel said that he would agree to the match if Batya was comfortable with the arrangement.

Batya took two days to think the proposal through, but after prayerful consideration, agreed to the match. She explained that she felt as though God had given her direction, and illuminated the good that could come from the marriage. She

was comfortable with Gabriel and felt there was a chance for love to grow between them in time. She felt her husband would have been glad to see her married and able to carry through with having children, with being able to save more children.

Abram performed the marriage ceremony for Gabriel and Batya within the week. Because of the war, it was not an elaborate ceremony, but rather a simple one. There was no party to celebrate the union, but they quietly observed all the traditions they could. It was a joyous occasion.

Abram watched Gabriel and Batya fall deeply in love over the next few months as they dedicated themselves to one another. Gabriel and Batya waited to adopt any of the children in the house, and attempt to gain legitimacy for growing their family.

Chapter 19

Hani sat under a tree outside his garrison's headquarters. He concentrated on sucking in air through his nose, and out his mouth slowly. He took a swig from his canteen, swished and spit, rinsing the taste of vomit from his mouth. His unit was fresh back from another ghetto "consolidation". Consolidation, what a clean word for such a dirty slaughter. Shooting people as they ran in the streets. Blood running in the road, and that was just getting the Jews gathered where the Germans wanted them. But that to Hani was not the most barbaric part of what his unit did on this trip.

Taking the children, those his leaders deemed "unable to contribute" to the war effort, was possibly the most sickening part of their activities. Separating the children from their parents, pulling them away and loading them in the trucks almost broke Hani. These children were old enough to understand what was going on. The wails of fear and loss from parents and children would follow him all the days of his life. The terror on the children's faces as they were lined up next to the pit, he could not stomach the shooting, the killing that came after. He had to do something. He could not stop this train, but he maybe could do something to mitigate the damage.

He knew the Jews were people now. Not monsters, not offspring of the devil, but people, who loved, grieved losses, who were, in essence, just like him. Truth be told, they even worshiped the same God as he did. They were just misguided in terms of the birth of the savior, but then his own faith said no one was perfect, and all could be saved.

Thinking of God, he shuddered. He knew this slaughter to be a great sin against God. He fervently prayed for forgiveness nightly now, for his part in the destruction of an entire people. But he knew that protesting the activities of his unit may end in his own

death. He could do nothing for these people if he died alongside them. They truly believed that the Jews were a plague that needed to be eradicated. They thought removing them was doing God's work. He often daydreamed of turning his weapon on his fellow soldiers, but he knew that would accomplish nothing.

A shadow fell over him. Hany gazed up to see who had approached, squinting into the sun. "Heil Hitler, a great victory today over the forces of evil," his squad leader stood before him.

Hani jumped to his feet, his hand shooting out, and slightly up from his shoulder, palm down, fingers together, "Heil Hitler" the words tasted foul in his mouth.

His squad leader looked at the ground, and frowned at the pile of vomit, "Are you ok soldier?"

"I ate something that disagreed with me," Hani explained. His squad leader nodded, with a look of concern on his face.

"Go home, rest, you did not look well today during the cleansing. I understand why now." He grinned, "Dr Mengle wants more twins for his experiments. Tomorrow we are headed back to the ghetto north of Warsaw tomorrow, to the maternity ward again. There will be babies there, these people never learn. We will take the twins for the doctor and dispose of the rest of the Jewish spawn. I know you are eager to fight evil, and stop it's spread."

"Thank you, Sir, I think I will. Report time tomorrow?" Hani hoped his squad leader thought he was excited about the raid tomorrow. He was excited, but not about the raid. His mind was working furiously, thinking about some things he suspected

about that ghetto, and how he might be able to make a difference for at least some of the Jewish people.

“0800, I hope you feel better Hani.”

“Me too Sir, me too,” maybe he could do something. He left, but instead of heading home, Hani headed to the ghetto.

Chapter 20

Abram sat in his office, estimating the prices of sending a person to the United States on a ship based on pre-war prices and the increase in prices of goods and services in Poland, and going over his log of saved money for escape, and the pre-war prices of ships to the United States. His stash of funds had grown substantially. Malka's new job offered benefits beyond getting identification for the people in the house. Her pay was not insubstantial, and her family were able to use it to bribe guards who allowed them to buy extra groceries and toilet paper even though they were rationed. That pay allowed the household to save all the men's pay from the factory. Despite the increase in savings, the combination of increased family size and increased price caused Abram to re-evaluate the plan for an exodus.

After doing the calculations, he found his wife in the living room.

"Malka, we need to talk" Abram pulled her by the hand onto the couch. He caressed the side of her face, she leaned into his hand. "Malka, once I thought we could send all the children at once, but our family has grown." He sighed, "I don't think it is realistic to send them all at once anymore. We need to send them out one family at a time."

Malka nodded. "I have been thinking something similar" she said, "But who do we send first?"

"We send Raina and Omer with Raisa and Samuel, I am working on getting them passage already, we send them by train to Ustka where they board a boat." He smiled down at his wife, "I don't think it can be too difficult to get the appropriate travel papers. I wanted you to know first. I know your heart like mine, will fly, light once they are safe, beyond the reach of the Germans."

“I will miss the babies, our grandchildren.” Malka’s eyes filled with tears, a few slipping down her cheek.

“So will I, but they will be far safer there beyond the reach of Hitler than here hiding with us. I think it is only a matter of time until we are caught. We must get out as many as we can.”

“Abram, I thi” Malka was interrupted by a knock at the door.

Chapter 21

A young blond man stood at the door. He was dressed in a shirt and a pair of slacks. He spoke in broken Polish. The man held a large box. He was clearly German with the build and posture of a soldier. "Excuse me, the..." he paused, eyes moving as he searched for a word, "doctor, he is expecting a visit from the Third Reich. This visit, very bad" The young man handed the box to Malka, "Your babies, they need to be away from the doctor tomorrow."

"Our babies?" Malka was confused.

Abram swept in, and took the box, "Oh my," he said, "Were our grandchildren at the Doctor's establishment?" He reached out and put a welcoming arm around the young man, "Come in, come in young man!" Abram pulled the man in and shut the door. "Malka, please bring refreshments for this young man, he and I need to talk. We will be in my study." He glanced into the box. Inside lay a set of twins, wrapped in a blanket. He pushed the man forward into a room, staying outside, "I'll be with you in a moment, please make yourself at home" he shut the door. "Gabriel," he shouted, "Gabriel, come here please."

"Yeah Dad, what's up," the thud of feet on the stairs announced Gabriel's arrival before his voice did.

"Gabriel, I am glad that Batya recovered from giving birth so quickly. I have enjoyed spending some time with the new twins and giving you a break but I think perhaps they need to be fed and changed now." Abram shoved the box into Gabriel's hands, looking from Gabriel's confused face into the box, "We don't want Dr Mangla thinking they are Jewish twins, and using them for his experiments, now do we?" he said with some added emphasis.

“No Father,” Gabriel said, peeking into the box, “Especially after how Batya prayed for children,” he held the box tightly. He flew back up the steps, to take the children to his wife.

Abram watched his son speed away, took a breath and stepped into his office, shutting the door behind him.

“The babies, they are safe?”

“Yes, they are. They will be well cared for. What is your name?” Abram switched to German so the young man could communicate more easily. He had been working in a factory with Germans for over a year now and was able to speak conversational German fairly well.

“My name is Hani. I am glad I was right about you. I was not sure, I hoped I was right, but I was not sure.” He took a deep breath, “Being wrong may have meant my death.”

“Quite a risk for us both, I am sure you will agree. How did you know?” Abram settled into a chair, gesturing for Hani to do the same. “And does anyone else know?”

“No, I don’t think anyone else knows. I only suspected. I didn’t know for sure until you took the children. I saw you the day we threw the babies out the window. The others in my unit were too excited to strike a blow against what they consider to be evil, but I saw you, you looked horrified, and went inside. You did not come back out while we were there.” He shrugged, “I hoped your look meant you had compassion for them, the Jews.” He took a breath, “I have heard tales of gentiles who hide them at great risk. I took a chance that you might be one such.”

“You said your unit will visit the doctor again tomorrow. Do I have time to get all the other babies out before they come?”

“You may get out a few, but you cannot get them all out. I was able to warn the doctor, and he is doing what he can to protect as many as he can. I brought you the twins because if they were found what awaited them was less merciful than death. If all the babies are missing, my leaders will become suspicious, and start looking for them. It could also point to my involvement. I would not like that, and I don’t think you want them looking here. They have gotten very good at finding hiding places.”

Abram frowned, “I must let some die, in order to protect those who I have saved, a position I have been in before” He closed his eyes, feeling tears well behind them. “I don’t like it.”

“Yes, unfortunately. I promise, death for those left behind is both quicker and more merciful than what awaited the twins. I wish we could save more.”

“Starfish on the beach,” Abram breathed, “I can only save so many,”

“I don’t know what you mean by starfish, but yes, you can only save so many.” Hany echoed Abram’s deep breath, “But maybe I can help you save as many as possible.”

“Can you help me get some out to the coast, and get them onto a boat to America?” An ally among the Germans could be useful.

“I may be able to keep suspicion down, if I inspect their documents when I am assigned to check documents as people board trains.” He looked Abram directly in the face, “And I may be able to warn you so that your ... starfish? Can be more numerous.”

“Can you help get travel papers? I would like to send my family away to America.” Abram paused, he leaned forward in his chair, reached out and put his hand over Hani’s, looking Hani directly in his eyes, “All of my family members who have moved in, and all those still coming.”

“Maybe,” Hany said thoughtfully, “I may be able to do that.”

“I want to send them to America, away from all this violence. I would hate for them to get swept into a liquidation.”

“I understand. I would like to see your family reach safety as well.” Abram and Hany talked long into the night before Hany left, his heart lighter, knowing he was doing what he could, on his way to sleep for a few hours before meeting his garrison. Hany felt like he had a new family with Malka and Abram. He slept very well that night, probably the best he had slept in weeks.

Chapter 22

Malka was already asleep when Hani left, and Abram slipped into their bed. He snuggled against his wife, arm around her, he lightly kissed her shoulder. He did not want to interrupt her sleep; he decided his good news could wait until tomorrow. He lay his head down, and for the first time since the war came to Poland, he slept well.

The next morning, Abram and Malka enjoyed a few rare private moments at the dining room table. Abram lifted his coffee cup, breathing in the scent. Coffee was a rare luxury these days.

He smiled at his wife across the table, and reached for her hand, "We have been blessed with two new grandchildren, Malka "

She nodded, "Gabriel told me last night, when he came looking for diapers. I get to meet them today. He asked that I wait and allow him and Batya to bond with them last night. He did let me know they decided to name the girls Ruth and Esther."

"Ah, so we have granddaughters! I did not know! that's wonderful!" He squeezed her hand. "I think we should prepare for more adoptees, and for more grandchildren Malka," Abram grinned.

"Does this have to do with the young man last night?"

"It does," Abram filled his wife in on their conversation from the night before.

"We may even be able to have some newborns," he gestured to the doctor's house across the street."

But she frowned, "Do you think the women across the street will allow us to take their babies?"

"After what the Germans have done, yes, I think they will jump at the chance to hide and possibly save their babies. And who says we cannot take in the mothers

sometimes as well, if they are not on the Jewish registry at least?" he frowned, "Unfortunately we cannot save them all, or the Germans will get suspicious and start looking at houses with large families a bit too closely."

"We do what we can Abram, all that we can. No one can expect more."

Abram had been correct about the women across the street. Those who were not documented by the Germans did join their family, the ones who were registered had a staggering number of "miscarriages", losing children even as Abram and Malia's family grew. Thankfully the Germans did not keep tabs on the Gentile families. And now, when the Germans came to the door and wanted to search the house, there were so many family members with gentile ID that the Germans did not dream Abram and Malka would hide anyone.

Chapter 23

Life settled into a tedious uncomfortable pattern in the Fischer household. Over time, with the help of Hany, the family in the house grew. At times it felt uncomfortable, full, with so many people there were no opportunities for quiet time or privacy, but no one complained. They all knew it was better than the alternative.

Abram and Malka were unable to save all the babies, but Haney was able to let them know when the Germans were coming to take or eliminate the babies, and he was able to guide a few Jews he found in hiding to the Fischer house to hide.

Hany also took over gentile house inspections in the ghetto, never shirking his duty, but never looking too closely at the Fischer household, stating to his superiors that the family had proven to be trustworthy over time. He of course knew full well that there were Jews in the house, and if found he would have to report them, but he never managed to “find” any secret compartments in the house.

Once they had gentile identification, Abram was able to move more of the men in the house into working at the factory. Working in the factory gave the men the activity and mental stimulation they craved. It gave the women more room and a measure of privacy in the daytime, and a new appreciation for the men in the night. The women were able to bond like sisters, working at the chores that kept the home together. They milked the goats, collected the eggs, and made meals. They did the washing and helped one another watching the children. The new arrangement gave the families a sense of normalcy in this tense set-up.

The men working also added to the money he was able to put away to get people out of the country. Everyone in the house was aware of the plan to start moving them

out, family by makeshift family, and everyone was happy to participate, and pray that their turn came soon.

In March of 1941, just eighteen months after this nightmare began, Malka and Abram stood at the train depot with their oldest daughter Rani, her husband, and children. Each member of Rani's family clutched a bag. Omer also clutched a handful of papers.

"Do you have your tickets for the ship? and the travel papers that say you were all born in Germany? The Americans are not very open to refugees or Polish people right now. You better double check." Abram spoke to Omer, who checked his briefcase.

"I do, Father, right here."

"I am sorry we could not get you on a fancier ship, a cruise line or something more comfortable." Abram shook his head. "And I wish we could send more money with you to get on your feet."

"Dad, this is wonderful." Rani's eyes filled with tears. "The children will be able to grow up," she nodded acknowledging her mother's sharp warning look, "Away from all this war and violence," she continued smoothly. The family exchanged a flurry of hugs as the train pulled into the station, Omer handed their documents to a German officer who often inspected their home. The German inspected the documents, handed them back to Omer and nodded. The family boarded the train with promises to write as soon as they made it to America and got settled in a house and a job. The letters would be a pre-arranged signal that they were ready to provide a soft landing for the next family Malka and Abram were ready to send away from Poland.

Malka and Abram linked hands, weeping openly as their oldest child, their first grandchildren pulled away, waving out the windows in the train. They wept watching the grandchildren they needed like they needed air pull away, sad to see them go, happy they were safe. As soon as they reached their home, Abram went to his study, fell to his knees, and offered God a prayer of thanksgiving.

Abram and Malka waited anxiously, counting down the days it would take for Rani and Omer to reach America. Two days on the train, two weeks at sea, and they would arrive in Ellis Island. It would take time to get established, find work, and get a home set up. But America was a land of opportunity, of growth and prosperity. An industrious man like Omer should be able to find work quickly.

Every day the men went to work in the factory. Every evening, Abram gathered the children in the house. Some nights he recited the Torah to them so that their history may not be lost, and their faith would grow. Some nights he told them the story of Jabez and Abihu, so they would understand their part in the legacy when they got older. Some nights he read them the book of fairy tales he used to read Raisa and Samuel. Every night after reading, or reciting, he prayed with them. Often it was not just the children who gathered to listen, but many of the adults who wanted the connection to their lost families, to their heritage, their culture, and to feel closer to their God. Not a single day went by that someone did not ask if they had heard from Rani and Omer. They served as a beacon of hope for the families in the house.

It took five months, but Rani and Omer finally sent a letter. Omer had found a job in Buffalo, New York, making aircraft to support the allies in the war effort. The job

provided a tidy salary, allowing the family to purchase a home. They were finally ready, able to provide a landing for the next family.

When that letter finally arrived, everyone in the house breathed a bit more easily. Abram and Malka believed their legacy had begun; one family was out. There were only four people so far, but those four people included their daughter and grandchildren.

Each person in the house, every family prayed to become a part of that legacy. All they could do was pray that they could continue to hide in plain sight. Abram and Malka kept their conspiracy with Hany a secret from the members of their extended family. But they prayed they could continue to conspire with Hany and get more people out.

Chapter 24

Abram watched Gabriel and Batya fall deeply in love as they dedicated themselves to one another over the months after they were married. But Abram knew that in recommending their match, he had stacked the deck in their favor. They were a test bed, but it was a successful test bed. But a single instance of success was not enough. He needed another proof-of-concept match-up.

Abram's next attempt at matchmaking was his son Jakob. He planned to approach his youngest son Jakob about a possible marriage with a woman named Chaya. Chaya came to the house alone on a moonless night, looking for refuge and food. She had escaped from a work camp, dressed in rags and half starved, and had knocked on the door by sheer luck, looking for sympathy and food. Malka took her in that night and their family hid her. She was young, only nineteen, and had work papers. She watched as her ghetto was brutally liquidated. She describes watching her childhood friends and family shot as they were rounded into the middle of the encampment, next to the trucks the Germans came on. The Germans separated those with work papers first. Then the officers looked at the work details on the work papers and separated out a few more. If the project ended, the people assigned to those details were added to those without work papers. Then the people on active work details were marched to some truck to be moved, and those not on active details were marched to the trains by the Germans. She suspected they had been taken to Treblinka. Her parents, her siblings, she did not know what had become of them, but she suspected they had been killed. She had hopeless, empty eyes when she knocked on the door. She had reached the point she believed death would be better than freezing and starving.

As Chaya began to believe she was safe, a vivacious attitude with a thirst for life emerged. Her face lit up with her frequent smiles, her sweet face surrounded with a halo of curly black hair. With nourishment, she filled out and womanly curves appeared. It became clear that she was attracted to Jakob very quickly, as her smiles became warmer, and her eyes sparkled as they tracked him every time he moved through a space she could see.

There is little more attractive to a man than a woman who is in love with him. Or at least is infatuated with him. Jakob of course noticed Chaya watching him, making opportunities to speak with him. It was not long before he found her intriguing, interesting, and he returned her interest. Once they began speaking, they found they had many common interests, and differing points of view that allowed for interesting and challenging conversations. Seeing the attraction grow between them, Abram approached Jakob about the potential match. He asked his father to let him approach Chaya about the idea.

Before long, Abram noticed that they would spend long hours sitting on the porch, talking about their individual plans for after the war, when they would be free to live as themselves once more, when they would no longer need to hide, and live in fear of discovery. It was not long before Jakob and Chaya began to align their plans and plan for a future together. They came to Abram and asked him to officiate a wedding before he could suggest a pairing, taking their future into their own hands.

Abram knew joy had to be grasped quickly and held tightly in this time. Everyone breathed easier once another person hiding among their family was made legitimate in some way. He was as happy to perform Jakob's wedding as he had been to marry Leah

and Matthew, and he hoped it would be as successful as Gabriel and Batya. He prayed nightly for long, fruitful marriages for his children.

Chapter 25

After he was able to successfully match his two sons, Abram decided that he would approach the single men and women in his house, with his radical idea. He asked compatible men and women if they minded being paired as husbands and wives. He likened it to the traditional arranged marriages that had served their community well for generations. He explained that the matches would allow him to place orphaned children with families. He explained the plan would also further their ability to hide in plain sight, lending realism to the number of children in the house. He explained that married men and women would cut down the number of gentile sur-names necessary for their new identification, some of the men being “sons” or “nephews” would use the Fischer name, while women who were “daughters” or “nieces” would pick up new gentile names of their husbands once ID could be obtained for them.

Abram only asked men and women to pair as couples were after they had hidden in the house for a period with clear evidence of compatibility with one another. Abram only approached them with the idea after he saw their compatibility, often after he saw the pair demonstrate signs of attraction he thought could grow. Often, he suspected he simply hurried a process that was taking place naturally.

Over the several few months, there was a flurry of weddings. Among the men and women who hid with Abram and Malka love bloomed, and everyone seemed eager to reach for joy, and hold it tightly. It was a risk to be sure, but a necessary one, he thought. It was these new “couples” that took in the babies from the makeshift hospital across the street, and children Hani brought to the house. This arrangement bound the couples together at least until they got to America, and often after, if they wanted to provide the children and babies with a stable home. Abram did not just want to save

their lives, but to ensure they lived happy fulfilled lives. He never matched men and women that seemed incompatible. Abram was matchmaking to re-create a legacy for the Jewish people.

Chapter 26

The population of the house began to fluctuate, families leaving, more people coming in. Leah's family traveled to America six months later, in early October of 1942. Because Rani and Omer were already established, it was easier, quicker and less expensive to send Leah's family. Leah and Matthew had somewhere to go, somewhere to stay while they found a home, so they did not need to take as much money with them. Omer was able to get Matthew a job in the factory with him. The United States was turning out airplanes quickly and the factory needed more hands.

In late October of 1942, the Germans liquidated all the ghettos in the surrounding area, and moved them to Krakow. The move of the Jews renewed the need to get the families out of Poland. The Germans had not been too strict in defining those they could cart away, and Abram did not want the household to become a target. The Germans came through the neighborhood, looking for Jews who hid. They shot the ones they found on sight. Luckily Hani was one of the Germans who swept the homes, and he swept the Fischer household. He found multiple children hiding in other houses, and delivered them to Malk and Abram the night after the liquidation. Abram worried that one day it would not be Hani who came.

Though Abram and Malka mourned the loss of the other Jewish families in the neighborhood, the reduced number of people did relieve pressure on the food supplies and allowed the family to put more money aside to get their family out, allowing them to save more money and send more families away.

Once Leah and Matthew were established, Gabriel and Jakob's families were both able to leave at the same time, about three months later, they were able to spend Christmas with their siblings.

After Leah and Matthew, Gabriel, Batya and the twins left. Batya was pregnant at that time, and their baby was the first to be born on American Soil. Then Jakob and Chaya.

As families left, Hani helped replace the population of the house. He found people hiding as he swept houses after ghetto liquidation. He marked the houses in his mind, returning after the hordes of people were loaded on the train to Treblinka. He escorted them in the night to the Fischer house. Hani lamented the lives he knew would be lost, but he understood the starfish now. He could not help those who boarded the train, and he could not protest, or his leaders would scrutinize him. It could end his ability to help anyone, it could end his life. But he could help those few he found, those who were able to hide and avoid detection from the others.

The influx of people presented a new problem in terms of identification. In the fall of 1943, the identification office started to apply more scrutiny to their paperwork. A German officer was stationed inside the ID office where Malka worked. As a result, Malka began to worry that the extra identification she processed, the new names would draw unwanted attention. She discussed her concerns with her husband one night.

“Malka, my love, have you ever considered, it takes time to become a citizen of the United States? It takes two years just living there. Perhaps our children lost their Identification?”

“I don’t know how that helps?” Malka’s gaze rested on her husband’s face.

“Malka, the people in your office know our children have fled to the states, and they know that they need ID in America. If our children lost their ID’s, it would be natural for you to replace them. But the Germans here, in the ghetto, they don’t know who who

is. We can re-use the names of those who have already gone. Travel papers are in a different office.”

“Abram, that is brilliant!” Malka grinned.

“I have a good idea from time to time,” Abram smiled at his wife. “No matter what this world throws at us, we can handle it together my love.”

And so, they did, for the next three years, until the end of the war came, and they finally moved to America to live out their years with their children. Rani and Malka built their legacy one family at a time, they saved babies and children, men and women, a drop in the bucket compared to the number of people lost to the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem, starfish on the shore tossed back into the ocean.

Epilogue

The small girl exited the blue ford pickup, slamming the door. She sprinted to the porch, hands outstretched, long dark curls streaming behind her. "Grandma! I am here! I get to stay a whole week!"

Jabez stooped down, holding her arms wide for her grandchild, who rushed into them. She stood and swung the girl in a circle, "Abigail! My Lord girl but you have grown!" She sat the girl down and greeted her son, "David," She reached out to hug him, "Do you have everything you need for your trip?"

"I do, mother. Casha and I cannot wait to go to Israel! It will be so exciting!"

"I am glad the Iron Dome is working well. The Palestinians have been very active lately."

"Me too, I don't know if we would go if it wasn't working well. This will be the vacation of a lifetime. A land set aside just for us, one where we don't have to hide who we are, or what we believe. Do you ever think we will be free of antisemitism?"

"It was that way when my grandmother came here as a child. I used to think America was the land of religious freedom, where we could be open about our faith. It is insane how things are changing right now.``

The small girl bounced up and down on her tiptoes, trying to get the attention of the adults engaged in conversation.

"Grandma! Will you tell me the story of Jabez? Not you, the one you are named after? And the story of How Great Grandma Raisa came to America with her family? The Starfish story?"

"I will baby! You know my parents named me Jabez specifically to remind us of the story, to ensure we would always share our family's stories. I am duty bound to tell

you the story!" She turned to her son, "I love you, be safe." She reached down to grab Abigail's suitcase as her son walked away. "Let's go get you unpacked. Pop Pop is so excited to see you! He is at the store getting you some special snacks. He thought you could camp in the yard and have a weenie roast and make smores tonight."

"YAY! Grandpa always has the best ideas!"

Several hours later, weenies roasted, smores eaten, a sticky Abigail was tucked into a sleeping bag in a tent in the yard. Jabez and Benjamin sat in adirondacks next to the fire, watching the embers glow and dance in the dark. The stars shone brightly overhead, the milky way cutting a gash through the star littered darkness of the night sky. The air was crisp, the beginning of fall was upon them. Benjamin reached for Jabez' hand.

"You have been very quiet this evening my love, is something on your mind?"

"When Daid and Casha were dropping off Abigail, David asked me if I thought we would ever be free of antisemitism, and I have been thinking about it a lot. I don't think we will ever reach the proportions of the pharaohs in Egypt, nor do I think we will face another holocaust, but then, I am sure our ancestors never dreamed human cruelty would reach the proportions it did during those times. Our family was very lucky, blood, and extended. The story of Abram and Malka shows how we can resist, if we remain vigilant. I pray nightly that we will never face that level of persecution again, but.." Jabez voice trailed off.

"But the way things in this country are moving, you are unsure if you believe we are safe even here, in the freest nation in the land," Benjamin finished for her. She nodded, tears in her eyes.

“And this time, it is not just that they believe we are the cause of their issues, nor is it that we are too numerous, the holocaust saw to that. It is nothing more than naked aggression, with no cover. A belief that we take up room where others belong, that others believe they are owed. It is hard to feel safe when not just the people, but even elected officials practice antisemitism. Have you seen the news, Benjamin?”

“What have you seen, my love?”

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Curriculum Vita

Kristina Thoman is a wife, mother, student, and retired Soldier. She has been married to her husband for 27 wonderful years. She and her husband Clint have two sons, Gabriel, an Eagle Scout, Army Reserve Soldier and a full time diesel mechanic, who has been married two years, and Jacob, a student pursuing a welding degree and working as a certified guard at a local college.

Kristina has a bachelor of Arts degree in Literature from University of Maryland Global Campus, a Master of Education in Secondary Education from the University of Arizona, a Master of Education in Learning Design and Educational Technology from Arizona State University. After completing a Master of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso, she plans to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design, and a Master of Science in User Experience Design.

Kristina is the United States Powerlifting Federation's Arizona State Chair and Assistant Technical Monitor. She hosts powerlifting meets in Southern Arizona. She has also served as a Scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 413 in Southern Arizona. She currently works as an Instructional Designer at a Department of Defense (DoD) Schoolhouse, improving training across the full spectrum of the DoD.