

REDEMPTION

I watched in horror as my life began to change little by little. There were things I couldn't do anymore because of my heritage, because I was Jew.

"Come on Fisher!" I think the whole school could have heard Rudy's voice.

"Rudy I am not going to do this, not today." What else was I supposed to say? Rudy was only the toughest and biggest eleventh grade boy in Poland! I was not about to get beat up in front of the whole school, not yet anyways.

"You're such a chicken Fisher."

"I don't care what you say about me, I am not going to fight you."

"Hey everyone, FISHER'S A CHICKEN!" Rudy was on top of the table making sure that everyone had joined in his little chant. I slammed my books to the ground. I know that I said that I didn't want to get beat up but how could I look like a chicken in front of my school? Rudy took one giant leap from the table and landed right in front of my face. I could hear my sister's voice in the back trembling with fear,

"Please don't do this Jeremy, mommas going to be worried, please don't."

"Yeah Fisher your moms going to be worried," said Rudy with an evil chuckle.

"Go home," I commanded to Lydia, my little sister. By this time Rudy had backed up away from me. I glanced toward him and all I can remember seeing was this look in his eyes that just told me he hated me. Why was he staring at me like that? Because I was a Jew. I turned my head back towards Lydia who had tears rolling down her pale pink cheeks. Without saying a word she turned around and started walking in the direction toward home.

"Rudy," I thought to myself. How the raging passion inside of me yearned to hit him. I turned back once more only to find that everyone watching had began a circle enclosing Rudy and I right in the middle. Rudy had already taken a step closer to me and his arm was at his side, ready to swing at any time. Let me first just say that along with my world changing, there were a few rules at school that changed for me also. For example, Jews were not aloud to hit other non-Jewish people. I stood with my back facing the school, closed my eyes and got ready for what could have been the hit of my death.

"This is going to hurt, Fisher," said Rudy with what I knew was a smile on his round chubby face. Then before I knew it I was on the ground. Rudy's swing was so powerful, I could hear the wind as his arm extended to hit me. The hit was so strong it felt as if I couldn't feel my face. One thing for sure was I couldn't even open my left eye, it was swollen shut.

"Jeremy Fisher, you get in here right now!" That was the voice of my English teacher Mrs. Rolfings. I heard the stammering of footsteps slowly fade away. The crowd that had watched me fall to my face had run away and not one stayed to help.

"Mrs. Rolfings I'm sorry but Fish, I mean Jeremy, wanted to fight me and of course you know the rules." Rudy knew just what to say to the teachers.

"Of course Rudy I understand you are free to go." Mrs. Rolfings was also a Jew, so no matter what her opinion in the matter was, no one cared, as long as hers favored that of the German kids. Rudy knelt down next to me, I'm not sure how close he was but his voice was in a whispered tone, careful not to let Mrs. Rolfings hear him say,

"Later, Fisher." I still couldn't quite open my eye, but I could squint out of the other one just to see Rudy

walking home as if nothing had ever happened. I knew that he had to have been laughing about the whole thing since he was going to get away with it.

"Jeremy I think we need to get you home," said Mrs. Rolfings in a sweet voice. I couldn't say anything; I didn't feel like saying anything. Mrs. Rolfings helped me get my stuff together and wrote a note for my mother explaining what had happened.

"Jeremy, you be careful on your way home." All I could do was shake my head.

It took me awhile to get home considering I couldn't see out of my left eye. I stood at the door just waiting because I knew my mother was not going to be happy. As I reached for the handle my mother opened the door. Gasping as she saw me eye she grabbed my face,

"Jeremy, your eye, oh let me look at it?"

"Mom I'm fine." She grabbed onto me as tight as she could and I could feel her tears as her face gently touched mine.

"Mom really, it's okay just a little bruise, that's all."

"Lydia get your brother some ice," commanded mother. I looked at Lydia who was starring at her shoes. I knew she was afraid I would be mad at her for telling mom.

"Lydia its ok, I'm not mad at you." Lydia ran towards me and gave me a hug and was off to get some ice.

"Jeremy, that boy should be in trouble," said mom," when your father gets home we will discuss this with him. Honey I am sorry about all this, Jews are just as much of a person as a German is."

"I know mom but why can't anyone else see that."

"They will, soon they will."

I went upstairs to rest and let the ice set on my eye for awhile. While I was up there I couldn't help but think about what happened to me, why Rudy hated Jews, and for that matter why anyone hated Jews. I knew that mother said someday they will realize that Jews are people too, but will they, or will my life continue to get worse?

I was asleep for a long time and didn't wake until Lydia came into my room. I sat up on the edge of my bed.

"Oh sorry Jeremy," she said," I didn't know you were sleeping. I should have knocked."

"No it's ok; I should probably get up now anyways. Is dad home yet?"

"Yes he just got home. Mom told me to come get you because it's time for dinner."

"Alright tell mom I will be there soon I just need to wash up." Lydia nodded her head and left my room. As I walked to the bathroom I felt a sharp stinging pain in my face. I looked into the mirror and remembered what had happened. I started feeling my face around my eye; at least I could open it now. Wow, Rudy sure can hit hard. I knew it was going to be awhile before it healed.

"Jeremy, dinner now!" Yelled my mom.

"Coming," I called back. I could smell dinner from upstairs. If only my mother wasn't a Jew she could open up her own restaurant. I always thought she was the best cook in Poland. I ran down the stairs as fast as I could ready for my favorite meal, potatoes and chicken. As I got to the kitchen my family stood around the table just watching me although I knew they were all staring at my eye. My dad walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Son let me take a closer look at that eye." I tilted my head back letting my dad look at my eye against the light.

"It will be bruised for awhile, but I think it's fine." My father walked back to his seat, we all sat down and began eating our supper. Dinner that night was quiet. It felt weird to sit there and not talk at all. Usually my dad tells my mother about his day at work, even if it was a good day or a bad day. I kept peeking a glance at my father who sat with his elbow on the table and his hand covering his face. Something was not right; my mother always gets mad at us for bad table manners, which means no elbows on the table. The room was so silent all that could be heard was the scratching of forks against my mother's china. Those were my favorite foods to eat and I did not even enjoy them that night.

"May I be excused?" I said silently.

"Yes," was all I heard and I wasn't even sure who said it. I got to the sink and rinsed off my plate. When I turned to go upstairs my sister had already excused herself. As I walked upstairs I couldn't help but picture my father's face in my mind. He looked so helpless, like he was trapped in a closet with no air. Whatever it was I

was sure it wasn't anything he and my mother together couldn't handle.

I layed on my bed that night trying to fall asleep but I could hear my parents arguing from downstairs. They were yelling at each other and they had never done that before. I tossed and turned and even tried to cover my face with my pillow, but I could still hear their voices. Something wasn't right. I tip-toed out of bed, careful not to get a squeak from the wood floors, and sat on the stairs so I could make out the argument from below.

"Jim how can this be happening!"

"I don't know Susan, the world is just changing! What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to promise me we are going to stay together as a family and that we will be safe."

"I don't know if I can make that promise." I heard my mother's tears turn into sobs. What were they talking about? I had no idea, but I wanted to run into my mother's arms and tell her everything was going to be ok. Was everything going to be ok?

"Susan I saw them again, but this time they came marching down the streets with their guns. There were thousands of them."

"Jim what are we going to do? What happened with Jeremy today was just a small incident. With these soldiers and their new rules we can't just stay here."

"They are called Nazis. At work today I was forced to wear a golden star with Jew written on it. It's only going to get worse from this point on. We will have to do something but we don't have to make the decision now."

"Oh, Jim."

I heard my sister's door open and the creaking of her footsteps.

"Lydia, be quiet!" I said trying to hush her.

"Jeremy I could hear them from my room. What's going on?"

"I wish I knew, but I don't."

"Jeremy I'm so scared!"

"It's going to be ok." I said. For a long time we sat there just hugging each other and listening to our parents.

Chapter 2

I woke up the next morning early. I didn't remember going to bed at all last night. Then it hit me, last night my parent's conversation. I didn't know what exactly they were talking about but I knew it couldn't be good. A loud bolting crash of thunder shook the house and it wasn't long before my window was lit up with flashes of lightning. I went over to my window and pulled back the curtain. The rain pouring down, which beat so loud against the house, sounded as if someone were throwing golf balls at it. I put on a T-shirt and jeans and headed down stairs.

I breezed past the staircase and headed toward the kitchen. Why didn't I smell eggs and bacon? My mother always fixes us the same breakfast every Saturday. I looked at the table to once again see my parents circled around it in silence. What I didn't expect to see was my father. He has to work on Saturdays, but he was still here.

"Hey, um what's going on?" I said as I noticed tears trickling down my mothers face. When I tried to speak again my voice wasn't as strong. I wanted to cry for my mother. I hate seeing her cry.

"Dad why are you still here," I managed to squeal out in a voice that did not sound confident at all.

"Son we have something we need to talk about. All of us need to talk about it as a family." Lydia had just come around the corner, her face just as anxious and twisted as mine was when I saw my parents sitting at the table.

"Mamma are you ok?" Lydia asked. Lydia went over to mother and gave her a hug and sat there wrapped in her arms. Lydia was such a compassionate person. It was like most of the time whatever we were feeling she tried to feel the same. If we were happy, she was happy for us. If we were sad, she cried for our pain. I just hoped whatever our parents had to say wouldn't destroy her.

"Your mother and I have been talking and it's getting worse in this place for Jews to live here." Ok, I knew that it was getting worse. I mean I wasn't even allowed to defend myself when getting beat up!

"We don't want to scare you but as of yesterday Poland has officially set up some new rules for Jews."

"New Rules!" I shouted pounding my fist against the table.

"How can they give us new rules, we are still people and we get treated like dirt already."

"You think this is easy for us too," my dad shouted jumping out of his chair. I loved my dad and I knew he loved me, but when he got angry I got scared. I could see my father's face soften as he walked closer to me and put his arm on my shoulder,

"I lost my job yesterday, because I wasn't German or Polish." I couldn't really say anything. I was caught up not only in the fact that my dad lost his job because of that but how does anybody just set in their minds that Jews are the cause of problems? I didn't know what to say back to my dad.

"It gets harder every day, but we need to stand together as a family." Said my dad staring at every one of us as he spoke.

"Next week if Jews want to even leave their house we must wear a yellow star with the word Jew written on it." As he was speaking I wondered why his voice wasn't filled with anger and complete hatred towards the people responsible for doing this to us. My heart wanted to

explode. I was burning with anger deep inside and what I would have given just to knock the lights out of Rudy. My father continued,

"Many of us Jews are losing our jobs, but being forced to work in Polish factories. We will be given food cards and we are only allowed to take what the card tells us we can have. We must ration."

My mother finally spoke up,

"Everything will be just fine. We can get through this together."

"But who is being forced to work in these factories?" piped Lydia.

My father's head turned and he stared at me for what seemed like an hour.

"Jeremy and I must start this work tomorrow," he said.

"No! No, no, no!" I said.

"I will not work for these people."

"Son if we don't work, we don't get food."

I couldn't say anything and before when I said I thought my heart was going to explode well I felt just like jumping out the window and shattering into a million different pieces. Wasn't it enough that these people took away our rights, but now they want us to work for them?

"Kids listen, we must learn not to hate our enemies. I know it's tough and so easy to want to do, but if we hate the ones who hate us then that makes us just as bad as they are." Ok, I knew my father was right, but how I pictured my life was not working in a Polish factory, wearing a stupid yellow star, or only eating the food someone tells me I can eat!

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"Wake up Jeremy, it's our first day of work and we can not be late."

"Ugh," I mumbled. I tossed and turned and pulled the covers back over my head.

"Come on Jeremy, you have thirty minutes to meet me downstairs," my dad said pulling the covers off of my head.

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Almost five."

"In the morning," I said jumping up to peek outside my window. It was still completely dark outside. No one should ever have to get up this early.

"Well now you are down to twenty-eight minutes, so hurry up."

"Alright I will be down there soon." My dad left and shut the door, careful not to wake my mom or my sister. I threw on an old pair of jeans and grabbed a T-shirt.

"Good son. That was fast you still have fifteen minutes left." I could tell by my dad's voice that he was a little nervous about today. All we were going to do was work, what was there to be nervous about?

"You ready to leave?" My dad asked.

"Don't we still have time though?"

"There's nothing wrong with being early, shows how much you are willing to do."

"Uh what are we willing to do dad?"

"Whatever we need to do to keep our family alive," was my dad's reply. I just shook my head. I didn't understand what was happening.

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I opened the door and stepped inside first. Panting and out of breath I fell to the ground just wanting to sleep right there. I glanced back at my father, his eyes red with circles under them. How could I be so tired when my father got the worst shift? His job was loading all the heavy equipment in the trucks; all I had to do was help

make it. He looked so exhausted. We had worked thirteen hours straight, no breaks.

"Come on Jeremy let's see if your mother has supper ready."

"Ok," was all I could force out of my tired body.

CHAPTER 3

My father and I could hear sobs coming from the living room, where my mother and sister were.

"No, mama no, this can't be happening," cried Lydia.

"What's going on?" said my father in a worried tone. Although I could still barely move, I somehow walked into the living room, where my family was. Lydia was curled up into my mother's lap. My mother's shirt, stained with Lydia's tears. What's wrong? I thought. Something wasn't right.

"Lydia sweetheart, why don't you go upstairs and get ready for bed. I will be up there soon," said mama.

Lydia's face was bright red from crying. As she walked past me towards the stairs, I wanted to give her a hug. My mother's sad face was now looking straight at my father and me.

"It's Lydia's friend, Amber," said my mother in a whisper so Lydia couldn't hear. "She was killed this morning by a group of those Nazi soldiers, and her family was captured and taken to something called a concentration camp."

Out of nowhere, my father fell to the ground on his knees, like he was in sinking sand. I do not recall a time when I had ever seen my father's face look like everything was falling apart except for then. His hands were now covering his face.

"What is it Jim?" my mother asked as she went to put her arm around my father. He got up off of his knees and hugged my mother.

"I... I heard a few of the guys today at work talking about these concentration camps. I didn't believe them. Susan these camps are horrible wicked places."

"Jim," was all my frightened mother could say. I stood there watching my parents have this conversation that had my heart racing and my chest pounding. How could the

world that I have grown up in and loved, suddenly turn its back on me and make my life miserable?

"Susan, these men took there family in hiding. These German soldiers could come at any time and we need to be prepared."

"No Jim."

"Susan, I have to keep my family safe!" he said with and angry voice.

"We don't know if or when the soldiers could come, but we must be ready," said my father with hatred in his eyes. My mother looked up at my father and shook her head. I glanced at my mother and saw tears dripping down her face.

"We will talk more about it tomorrow, we need to get some rest," my father said looking only at me and Lydia. I couldn't believe what was happening. Everything I knew would be gone. In one night my world would be forever changed.

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The next morning Lydia and I awoke to our parents calling us downstairs. I didn't want to go because I knew it had to be about what had happened last night. Lydia met me outside my door.

"Jeremy, what do you think they want?" Asked Lydia.

"I don't know," I lied. We walked down the staircase together. My parents were both sitting on the couch with suitcases beside them. Now I was really scared because my father and I were supposed to leave for work early and now I saw these suitcases. Were we moving? Lydia and I sat in the chairs across from our parents waiting patiently for them to tell us what was going on.

"Lydia," my father began, "last night your mother told me what happened to your friend Amber." I could hear whimpers coming from Lydia.

"I'm so sorry," he continued, "what we are about to do must be done for a reason, and that reason is to keep my family safe." Lydia and I exchanged blank stares. Finally my mother spoke,

"You kids understand that it is getting worse every day for Jews to live in this country." Lydia and I both nodded.

"Lydia what happened to your friend is happening to all kinds of Jewish families in Poland. There is no warning when it could happen, it just does," said my father. I knew something bad was coming. I took a glance to see what Lydia's expression was. There are no words to

describe what she looked like. I felt horrible for my sister. My stomach was nauseous and I couldn't even imagine what she was feeling.

"We can't stay here any longer; it is not safe for us. I'm not saying anything could happen, but if something did I couldn't forgive myself." My father said. He looked at my mother and she spoke,

"We need to go somewhere where it's safe."

"Like where?" I asked.

"We have to go into hiding," my father said looking down at his feet.

"NO!" cried Lydia.

"It's the only way." He said. My mother kept staring at my father. The look on both of their faces kept telling me that was not all of what they needed to say.

"Jim," my mother said kindly, "you need to tell them the rest of it."

I could tell it was my father's intention to keep it to himself, but my mother wanted us to know whatever it was. Lydia was still crying.

"We can't all hide together. It's not safe for too many people to hide in the same place." Lydia started screaming. It was hard for me to think. Life without my

whole family living together was awful to think about. My mother was over with Lydia trying to soothe her cries.

"Lydia and your mother will hide with the shoemaker's wife down the block. She is a Polish woman. You two should be safe there. Jeremy and I will hide with his teacher Mrs. Rolfings. She has agreed to take us in, but she will also be hiding a young lady, her name is Melissa I believe." My head was spinning. I couldn't live without my mother or Lydia. I needed them both in my life.

"Why do you guys already have your suitcases packed?" I asked.

"Jeremy we have leave tomorrow," said my mother.

"What!" I said angrily. If I would have known that I was only going to have seventeen years possibly with my family,

I might have lived a little differently. At that moment there was something that just felt like it bonded us as a family. I got up off of my chair and went to where Lydia

and my mother were sitting. I managed to wrap my arms around both of them, and I hung on to them like I was hanging on for my life, and that's what it really felt like. My father came onto the same couch as us. We all sat there not saying a word. Not even an "I love you". We didn't have to say anything. We could feel it. For the

rest of the night we sat there on that couch and enjoyed  
our family for what could have been  
the last time.

## CHAPTER 4

Early the next morning I awoke to find myself in the same position as the night before. My family was still cuddled up on the couch. I looked around trying to memorize every intricate detail of that house so I could later remember it if we ever came back to it. I tried to recognize every scent. There was something about where I lived that made it not just a house, but a home, a home where a loving family lived. I had so many memories of this house and one reason I also didn't want to forget it was because I wanted to always have those memories of my family with me.

As I looked at my parents sleeping I realized that Lydia was not where she had been last night. She was sleeping right beside me, but she wasn't there anymore. I peeled the blanket off me and in a slow fashion got off the couch, careful not to wake my parents.

"Lydia," I called in a quiet voice.

I walked upstairs to check her room, but she wasn't in there.

"Lydia," I tried again. I opened the door to my bedroom to find Lydia there on the floor going through all of my drawings.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Jeremy," she said with a sniffle, "I don't want to ever forget you. May I please have one of your pictures?"

"Lydia you won't forget me," I told her. I sat on the ground next to Lydia and we both went through all my drawings. Mother had told me over and over again that I was a very talented artist. She got me my first set of art supplies when Lydia was born, and my first picture with the set I drew of Lydia.

"I know which one to give you," I said. I went to the very end stack of papers and pulled out the picture of Lydia.

"Here," I said, "It's the first picture I ever drew in color. I want you to have it." Lydia rushed to give me a hug.

"Thank you Jeremy," she said. I did not cry when my parents told us Jews were losing privileges or when they

told us we had to go into hiding, but that day I cried with my arms around Lydia.

"Kids!" Our parents hollered from downstairs.

"It's time to start packing. We leave in two hours."

"I love you Jeremy," said Lydia clinging to the picture.

"I love you too," I replied. Lydia left my room to start packing. Our parents warned us not to pack much because we would not have much room. They told us only to bring a week's worth of clean clothes. I didn't know what to think. If we were only bringing a week's worth of clothes then we couldn't be staying very long, right?

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Thirty minutes before we were about to leave my father told us some rules about hiding. He looked at my mother and sister and said,

"You must be careful on your way to the shoemaker's house. Do not look anyone directly in the eyes and do not stop for anyone. Do you understand? You must keep walking until you reach his house." My mother and Lydia nodded their heads.

"When you are hiding," he continued, "you must never leave the spot in which you are hiding. It will be too dangerous; do not ever go outside until he tells you it is safe. The shoemaker is a good man, and I trust him. He will keep you safe. I'm sorry but Jeremy and I can't go with you. If they see a lot of Jews together they might be suspicious." My mother stood up straight and I knew that she would be ok with Lydia. I was sure Lydia would be a big help for mom. My mother got up from the table and walked over to my father and me. She hugged us both. Lydia ran to meet me and my father with such a loving embrace. Could this be the last time I ever saw them again? My father looked at my mother with an outstretched arm as if he were trying to hold them back and said,

"Take care of her Susan." I knew he was talking about Lydia, but I thought it would be more like Lydia taking care of my mother.

"God be with you," my mother replied as she shut the door behind her and Lydia. That was it. Two of the three most important people in my life had just walked out of it. It was hard to say anything when they left. My father and I stood there in silence, till I finally broke it.

"Do you think they will be ok?" I asked. He never answered my question.

"Get your things Jeremy; it's time for us to go." I grabbed my bag off of the chair. As I shut the door behind me, in the blink of an eye, I knew my world would never be the same again.

My father clenched his fist and knocked on the back door of the house. The outside of that looked as if no one had lived there for years. There were leaves growing on the side of the bricks and the yellow paint on the door that was coming off looked as if it used to be painted with gold. Oh gross! I thought to myself. I did not want to live in that house for even one day. My teacher Mrs. Rolfings, opening the door, had interrupted my thoughts.

"Come in quickly," she said. My father led the way. As I walked through the entryway the phrase "never judge a book by its cover" popped in my head. The smell of freshly baked apple pie flooded my nose. So many candles and pictures. I had never seen such a beautifully decorated place in my life. It was wonderful, and I could live with that smell forever. As I thought about how amazing this house was I wondered what Lydia and my mother were staying in.

"This is your room," she said leading us to a small crowded room in the basement. Mrs. Rolfings had informed us that even though she was a Jew her husband was Polish which erased all the Jewish background out of her heritage.

"Thank you," said my father. Mrs. Rolfings gave what looked like a smile and said,

"There is a young lady across the hallway who will be hiding here as well, her name is Melissa. Jeremy she is your age I believe," she said looking at me.

"There is one rule; you must not go upstairs from now on. Everything you need you will find down here." My father shook his head as if in agreement to what she had said. With out saying another word she left. That was it! We had to stay in that basement for who knew how long and she just left. I thought I was in prison. When would I even see the sun again?

My father turned to me and said,

"Jeremy why don't you go introduce yourself to that young lady."

"Ok," I said. Might as well get to know her since I didn't know how long I was staying there with her. I walked out of the tiny space my father and I had to share and headed in the direction toward her room. It amazed me

that out of how big that entire basement was the rooms we had to live in were not even a quarter of the size of the rest of it. I just shook my head and kept walking till I got to her room. I reached my hand up to knock on the door. Wait, what if she didn't want to talk to me? I stood there for awhile puzzled with that question. Oh who cares, I thought. It would be better to talk to someone than to live down there without ever talking to anyone. So I gave in and knocked on the door. To my surprise the cute blonde-headed girl opened the door with a smile on her face as if she had expected me.

"Hey," I said unsure what to say.

"Well hello there," she responded, "my name is Melissa and your name is Jeremy."

"Uh yeah," I said.

"Mrs. Rolfings told me that you and your father would be hiding here too."

"Do you have any family with you?" I asked.

"Um... no," she said. I didn't want to bug her about it because it really wasn't any of my business why she wasn't hiding with her family.

"Well I need to go do my laundry," she said, "you can come if you would like." What else did I have to do in a

basement? I figured if I went I could get to know her a little better.

CHAPTER 5

I went back to the room my father and I were living in to tell my father all about Melissa. I never knew that doing laundry could be fun. Well I didn't really do the laundry, but I talked with her the whole time! She was such a great girl. I think I might like her. I didn't know though and besides I didn't really need to be thinking about that stuff right then anyways.

I opened the door to the bedroom to find my father sitting at the edge of his tiny bed, staring at the wall. He did not turn around when I walked in.

"Dad," I said.

He still did not turn around. What was he doing? It's not like there was anything exciting to stare at on that plain white wall. So I tried one more time,

"Father."

This time he turned around. His face was so depressed. It looked as if someone had stabbed him in the heart, and there was a single tear rolling down his cheek. It suddenly hit me that he and my mother had been married for over a good twenty years. I knew what was wrong. If my father was this upset I couldn't even have imagined what my mother was like. The emotional pain I felt not only with my father, but also for him, was strong. I hated seeing him like that.

My father brushed the tear off of his face.

"Uh, yes Jeremy, what is it?" He said. I figured that I shouldn't tell him about Melissa and that I might like her. I didn't want to upset my dad even more about my mother.

"Nothing," I lied.

"How is that girl, Melissa, right?"

"Yes," I said, "she's a nice girl."

"Good," he said. There was a long period of silence that felt as if it lasted for a good ten minutes before I decided to break it.

"Dad is Lydia and mother going to be safe?" I asked. Oh dumb question, why did I ask that right then?

"Jeremy they will be just fine where they are," he replied. I shook my head as if in agreement.

"We also will be safe," he said with a confidence in his voice.

Its not like anyone would come down in this stinky old basement looking for us, would they?

"Mrs. Rolfings came down when you were talking to Melissa and said she would bring supper down. She should be down here in about five minutes."

The time had gone by with Melissa so fast that I had forgotten that I had not even eaten yet. I thought about the smell in her house when I had come in. The thought of baked apple pie was making my mouth water. I was sure that Mrs. Rolfings had to be an excellent cook.

Interrupting my thoughts of food, the basement door crashed open. Mrs. Rollings came running down the stairs. When she reached our room she was out of breath. My father quickly jumped off of his bed to see if Mrs. Rolfings was alright. By this time Melissa was already standing at our door. She must have heard the bang of the door too.

"Mrs. Rolfings what is it?" Said my father in a worried tone.

"It's... It's your wife... and daughter," she said taking long breaths in between her sentence.

"What about them!" My father shouted. Mrs. Rolfings was crying and shook her head as if not planning to tell him. My father grabbed her shoulders and shook her back and forth yelling,

"What about my family! Tell me now!"

"They didn't make it," she said still crying. My father released his grip on Mrs. Rolfings and started backing away from her.

"What?" He said in a whisper. My father's face was pale white and looked as if he had just witnessed a murder. Mrs. Rolfing repeated herself,

"They... didn't make it."

"What do you mean they didn't make it?" My father said in a voice as if he already knew the answer to the question.

"They were caught on the way to the shoemaker's house by a group of Nazi soldiers and taken to a concentration camp." She said.

"No! No! No!" My father shouted, both of his hands covering his face. I stood there, terrified, not knowing what to do. My hands were shaking and I couldn't control

them enough to stop. The hairs all over my arms and legs were standing straight up.

"Mr. Fischer," said Mrs. Rolfings, "there is a possibility that you and my husband can get them back."

"How?" My father said as if he would go to the ends of the earth to get them back.

"I can not explain in front of the children," she said, "but you and my husband need to leave now. When you go upstairs do not look out of any of the windows and go straight into our bedroom." My father shook his head.

"I must go now," she said, "but Mr. Fischer you must hurry." With that Mrs. Rolfings turned toward the stairs and left.

"I... I'm going with you," I said.

"Jeremy no, you must stay here. I can not risk losing you too," my father said.

"No dad! I have to go with you."

"Listen to me," he said putting his hands on my shoulders, "you will be ok. Mrs. Rolfings will be here with you and you need to look after the girl."

"I love you," said my father, giving me a hug.

"I love you too dad."

"I will come back for you," he said.

"Promise?"

He didn't say anything.

"Promise you will come back dad!"

"Mr. Fischer, now!" yelled Mrs. Rolfings from the top of the stairs.

My father kissed the top of my head and ran up the stairs. He never promised, I thought to myself. Just like that, my father was gone. I lost my mother, Lydia, and now my father. What was I going to do?

My mind went blank. I couldn't think. All of those memories I had from of my family that I wanted to remember, I couldn't think of.

I stood there, ready to pass out. My lungs started tightening up, which made it hard to breathe. My eyesight started getting fuzzy. It would blur in and out. All I could see was a world of darkness, pitch black. My head was throbbing, and I felt dizzy. It felt as if someone were spinning me, and they wouldn't stop. My hands were clammy and sweaty. My arms and legs were shaky. They felt like Jell-O. My whole body started to shake, until finally I could not stand up any longer.

CHAPTER 6

"Jeremy! Oh please Jeremy wake up!" shouted Melissa. I opened my eyes to see Melissa on her knees, very close to me. What was I doing here on the ground? Where was my dad?

"Melissa?" I said in a weak voice.

"Oh Jeremy, thank goodness you are alright. I didn't know if you were going to wake up." When she spoke I saw tears in her eyes. Her arms were warm as she reached around me to give me a hug. An electric spark ran through my body up and down my spine. What was that? I thought.

"Melissa... what happened?" I said.

"You fainted," she said, "I couldn't catch you."

"Why did I faint?"

"Your dad left with Mr. Rolfings," she said.

I stopped moving. My eyes were locked on the basement door and I remembered why he had to leave. Just three weeks ago my life was normal. I had a mom, a sister, and a dad. Now

I didn't know if I would have any of them back in my life ever again.

"Jeremy we should go upstairs and get you some water. You don't look very good." She said.

"No Melissa we can't go upstairs, you know the rules. I will be fine."

"But, Jeremy..."

"I'm fine." I said a little uneasy because I knew I wasn't really fine. I was scared and didn't know what to do with my father gone. Mrs. Rolfings banged the door open and rushed down the stairs. Last time she did that, something terrible happened.

"I'm sorry, but I must leave. I should not be gone for very long, but there is some business I must take care of."

"My father, he's ok right?"

"Jeremy I'm sure he is absolutely fine and by now they have probably got your family back and are on their way home. You don't have anything to worry about. Mr. Rolfings knows what he is doing." I just nodded my head. If I talked about my family I might have started to cry and I did not want to do that in front of Melissa.

"I know you two will be just fine on your own. Listen very carefully though, do not open the door for anyone. Even if it is your father's name you hear do not open it. It is very important that you listen to me about that. Second, do not go upstairs for any reason. I will bring plenty of food down here that should last the amount I will be gone. So there is no need for you to be up there. I must leave now, but please children listen to what I have told you."

"We will," I promised her. She gave me and Melissa both a hug and then left. She didn't say what she was doing or where she was going to go. I wish people would stop leaving. That's what my life was now, people leaving. Who could I trust? Well I knew Melissa wasn't going anywhere, so I could count on her not to leave. She was stuck in the same mess I was, no family. I wanted to ask her about her family, but now just wasn't the time. We were both sad. It was just us in the house. We had to make our own decisions now. No adults, we were on our own.

"Jeremy, where do you think she went?" Melissa asked me.

"I don't know." I said.

"Ugh, I'm so tired of being stuck in this stupid, old boring basement. I have been here for a month." She said.

"Wow, a month." I said. I couldn't imagine being there for a month. I had only been in there for a couple of days and I already hated it.

"Yeah, it's terrible. Hey since Mrs. Rolfings left why don't we go upstairs for a minute?" She said.

"No, no Melissa we can't I promised her we wouldn't go up there. She's only been gone for ten minutes, we can't go just now. Maybe a little later, but we really shouldn't."

"Oh Jeremy, she will never know!"

"Melissa that's wrong, we better not."

"I know Jeremy, but what if we were only up there for like five minutes. I mean we don't have to stay up there forever. Come on Jeremy Please!"

"I don't know..."

"Don't you just want to see the sun again, Jeremy?"

"Well that would be nice I guess..." Melissa walked over to where I was standing.

"Please!" she pleaded grabbing my hand. How could I say no to that?

"Fine I said, but only for a little bit and we have to come back down when I say so, ok?" I said giving into her pleading.

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!" she said giving me a hug.

"You welcome." I said with a smile on my face. Anything I could do to get her to like me was worth a shot.

"Remember though when I say it's time for us to come back down, then we need to." I reminded her.

"Of course," she said smiling.

"Oh Jeremy I haven't been up there for weeks." She said.

"Well let's go then." I couldn't believe I was going up there. I knew my father would be disappointed in me for doing what I was about to do, but he was gone and he didn't have to know about it.

"Ok, let me go first" I said to Melissa. She nodded her head. Ok, I thought to myself. You can do this, no big deal. Just go up for a minute and then come back down. I took a deep breath and started walking up the stairs. I glanced over my shoulder to see Melissa right behind me. I put hand on the doorknob and twisted it open. I looked around all the blinds were opened and the lights on.

"Maybe this isn't such a good..." Before I could finish my sentence Melissa had moved around me and was about ready to open the front door. I started heading in that direction. BAM! The front door slashed open, and in came three men. One of the men grabbed Melissa by her hair and held a gun to her head.

"Put your hands up!" they screamed at me.

"On the floor! Get on the floor!" They yelled. I put my hands above my head and got on my knees. I could hear Melissa's cries and shrieks of pain. My heart was beating too fast and I could feel my pulse running through my veins. They started yelling in German, and I couldn't understand what they were saying. Tears rolled down my face. I wanted my family; I needed my father. Two of the men came over to where I was. One of the men blindfolded me.

"Melissa!" I yelled. I couldn't see her anymore.

"Shut up!" the guards yelled.

"Let her go!" I said. One of the men punched my stomach.

"Ahh!" I winced. I couldn't breathe. The men carried me outside and shoved me into the back of a van. As they started driving away the guilt in my heart for disobeying

my father hurt worse than the blow in my stomach. My face was dripping in sweat and tears. What was going to happen?

CHAPTER 7

There were thoughts running through my head. Why did I ever go upstairs? Where was my family? Was Melissa ok? I couldn't believe that after promising my father and Mrs. Rolfings that I still went upstairs. I had no clue what was going to happen to me, but most importantly I didn't even know where Melissa was. What if they killed her? I was shivering, not only because I was cold, but also because I was scared.

The cloth tied around my eyes became wet and started slipping from eyes. It wasn't slipping enough so that it came off completely but just enough of a sliver for me to see. I thought there were only three guards that took me but as I looked around I saw not three but seven! Each one wore what looked like a crooked cross on their sleeve. They all had weapons, more than one gun.

"Halten Sie das Auto auf! Wir sind heir!" All seven of the men turned around. I quickly shut my eyes. Did they know I saw them? What did they say? I wish I knew what they were saying. One of the men started untying me and took off the cloth that covered somewhat of my eyes.

"Steigen Sie aus!" He hollered at me as he shoved me. I shook me head. I didn't understand what he was saying. He repeated himself, only this time much louder and the shove was with more force.

"I...I don't know what you are saying." I said softly. He grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the van. He shouted again and pointed in a direction. I began walking in that same direction. What is this place? I thought. There were fences with barbed wire that had to at least be fifteen feet tall, all around that place. Everyone looked the same. Why were they all wearing striped clothing? Not one of them had hair! I wanted desperately to turn around and run in the other direction, but all seven of the guards were behind me. As I entered the place I saw that there were people like me everywhere. Women and children were crying and screaming. The men tried to comfort them, but were being separated from them. One of the guards behind me who spoke my language told me to get in line. They all

took their guns out. I was shaking and hurting inside not knowing what was going to happen. I felt so alone even though I was swarmed with people around me. The guards got every person into a single straight line. As I looked down the line it must have gone on for a mile. There were so many people. I suddenly felt weak and nauseous. What were they going to do with all of us? Was my family here too? I poked my head out searching down the line for a familiar face. A guard stopped at me and stared at me for a while,

“Two!” He shouted loud enough for the whole line to hear. What did two mean? My lungs started tightening up. What if I passed out again? The guards started yelling out the “one’s” were supposed to go to the right and the “two’s” were supposed to go toward the left. No one started moving until one of the guards shot his gun into the air and told us to hurry. It was mass chaos trying to find my way to the left. My breathing was heavy and my heart was racing from hearing the shot. As I got to the left I watched the rest run to their spots. I began noticing that the left side was mostly men my age and a little older and some stronger looking women. The right side was full of women, children, and elderly people. There was a little boy in the middle crying out to his

mother, who was on my side. The little boy had been sent to the right and didn't want to be separated from his mother. She ran to the middle to meet him. One of the guards tried to pull her off of him. She wouldn't budge. The boy and his mother were both crying and yelling. Another guard came over to help but instead of trying to pull her off of her son, he held up his gun and shot her.

I tried my best to fight back the tears that wanted to spill out. I didn't know how much longer I could control it. I wanted to run to that little boy, who was now covered in his mother's blood. He cried and stayed with his mother's body until one the guards pulled him off. One of the guards left with the little boy and neither one of them came back.

The right and the left sides were taken to different places. I followed the men in front of me. We were taken to a room where we were to put all of our belongings into a pile, which included our clothes. We were given a new set of clothes, which was the only pair we got. I didn't understand why we couldn't just keep on the clothes we had. The guards were trying to make us go faster. Next, we were taken to different lines. We all had to get our heads shaved. Why were they doing this to us? I closed my eyes

when I got to the front of the line. I looked no different than any one else around me, yet for some reason I was embarrassed. I looked at some of the women that had to get their heads shaved. Most of them were crying. When they were done it was hard to tell them apart from most of the men. One of the guards yanked me forwards to move up. How many more lines would I have to go through? The next one look painful and I wanted to go to the very end of the line. Guards were engraving numbers into the skin of every one in line. When I reached the front of the line I carefully made my way to the guard. I shut my eyes and waited for him to permanently scar my arm. As he began it took every ounce in my body not to flinch. The pain seared in my right arm. It felt like fire burning through me. I still had my eyes closed when someone pushed me. I opened them and realized he was done with my arm. I looked around and saw no more lines. What I saw truly scared me. There were men working who looked just like me but thinner. I could see just about every bone in their faces, that's how skinny they were. I caught the eyes of a young man walking past me. I couldn't even express the pain and sorrow I saw in them.

My heart began pounding as I wondered if I would ever look like that. Guards started shouting again, and putting us into different groups. There were about fifty men in the group I was in, some looked about my age, but it was hard to tell since now we all looked the same. Two guards led us to a room, which they called a barrack. We all stepped inside. The room was so tiny. I don't know how they expected us all to fit in there. There about twenty bunk beds, all of which were smashed together.

The guards started explaining the rules for the, "camp", they called it. I was in the very back, so it was hard to hear. I started thinking about what would have happened if I would have listened to my father and Mrs. Rolfings. Now I didn't know where Melissa was or if my father was ever going to come back with the rest of my family; I was all alone. What hope did I have now of ever finding my family again? What hope did I have of living? There was no reason for me to live anymore. I had nothing and I had nobody.

CHAPTER 8

Later that night as I lay in my bed I could hear gunshots. The shots sounded so close I jumped every time I heard one. What kind of a place is this? I was still trying to figure that out. I didn't know why I was there. What kind of people would do this to someone?

I began thinking about the woman who was shot today and how the little boy had never returned. I wanted to cry like him every time I thought of my family. If they say me crying like that would I be killed?

BANG! BANG! BANG! I jumped out of my bed alarmed realizing that this time the shots I heard were not in my dream but right outside of my barrack. I looked around to see most of the other men jumping up as well. Some were shouting. My body ached in hunger and I was shivering. The weather outside was very cold and the clothes I was wearing seemed not enough to bear it. One by one German guards were pouring into our room.

"Hurry up and get in a line! NOW!" One of the older looking guards yelled. I struggled to find my way in the line as others kept pushing their way through. I was running and trying to get in there. There was no room in there for all of us to fit in a line. An older man grabbed my shoulders and yanked me in line in front of him. As much as it hurt when he grabbed my shoulders I was thankful for what he did.

"Boy you better listen to these men. They are nothing to mess with. You always do what they say. Save your own life first." He whispered very lightly in my ear. I started turning around to thank him.

"Don't turn around boy! You always look at them!" He said. Before I could make my way back around again, one of the guards walked to where I was.

"Get In the back of the line." He said getting close to my face. His voice was enough to send shivers up and down my spine.

"Go!" He yelled. I ran to the back of the line as fast as I could. Why was I always supposed to look at them?

Our line was led to a big kitchen. Food, I thought to myself. Finally we got some food. I couldn't stand it;

the smell of food was going to make me throw up if I didn't get to eat some soon. Going to the back of the line was a punishment. Gradually the line began to move forward. I grabbed a plate just like the men had done in front of me and waited for them to give me food. In my head I imagined oatmeal with a slice of toast and an apple. My mouth started watering. I glanced down to see the food on my plate. It was water with potatoes and one sliver of meet in it. It slid across my plate. How was I supposed to eat that? The smell was terrible, like it had been left out for days. I stood there staring at it like I somehow expected it to turn into the food I wanted to eat.

"Move!"

I turned around, and it was the same guard who yelled at me earlier.

"Are you going to make a habit out of disobeying the rules?" He said pulling out his gun.

"N... no sir," I said.

"Then move."

I tried as hard as I could to get out of his way and tried to find a seat.

"Over here boy." Said the same gentlemen who had pulled me into line. I made my way over to where he was

sitting. He had a warm smile on his face. He held out his hand,

"My names Asher." He said.

"Jeremy," I said shaking his hand. I sat down across from him. He was eating his food like it was the best thing he had ever tasted. I glanced at my food, and did not want to eat it.

"Do you want mine?" I said shoving the plate in his direction.

"Boy you need to eat it. It will give you strength."

"This watered down soup will give me strength?" I said questioning him.

"Yes," he said motioning me to eat. I took a bite and I couldn't stand the taste.

"When do we get real food?" I asked.

"Real food, he said, "Boy listen to me I have been in this place for a number of weeks now and I can tell you all there is to surviving it. There is no real food. This is the only food they got."

"Please tell me." I said very interested in what he had to say.

"Rule number one, you always obeys the guards. Even if you don't like it, you always listen to them. Second,

you do it with the best attitude you can. Most importantly, the key issue in surviving this place, don't ever show emotions. You can't cry, or act upset. Don't ever dwell on the past. If you think about the sad things you start acting sad and before you know it your gone." I was amazed at what Asher had to say. How was anybody supposed to have a good attitude around here?

"If I was going to have a good attitude and not let my emotions show, how would I do it?" I asked.

He chuckled a little, "It's all a mind game boy. Your mind will trick you into feeling one way, but you got to learn to control it to only think positive. If you aren't thinking it then you got to feel it. Don't worry boy you will get used to it."

BANG! BANG!

The gunshots still scared me. "Why do they do that?" I asked.

"I doesn't matter boy. They can do whatever they want here. Now come one we will be late for work."

"Work?"

"You didn't think you would be here all day with nothing to do did you?" he said chuckling.

"Well no I guess not." I said.

"Come on boy this time stand up straight in the line. Keep your head up and your shoulders back. They only pick the strong ones."

"What do you mean they..."

"Shhh!" said Asher. I did what Asher said. One by one men and boys were being taken out of the line.

"This one!" A soldier yelled pulling me into a pile with others. I looked back and the men left were either old or very skinny. Asher was not in the same line as me. He was taken to a different group.

My group was led by a mass of strong looking soldiers. One of the guards shot his gun into the air and everyone in front of me began to walk. We walked for what seemed like hours. There were guards all beside our line with guns at our sides to make sure we didn't run away. They told us what would happen to Jews who tried to run away. I glanced behind me to see the line with the old and skinny men barely keeping up. One man started lacking behind and one of the guards struck him with his gun. The man fell to the ground.

"Get up!" shouted the guard. I wanted to help him up. I tried to turn around and help him, but I knew what would happen to me if I did. I couldn't look at him anymore.

Positive. Positive. Positive. I kept repeating to myself.

"Get up now!" the guard kept yelling at him.

BANG! One gunshot and the yelling stopped. I covered my ears and started crying. Positive. Positive. I repeated again until I just couldn't say it anymore.

CHAPTER 9

It was almost dark outside by the time we reached our destination. There was already a group of men there. The soldiers yelled at their group to start marching back to camp. I watched the men marching past me. Their faces were struck with horror. Some had tear stains across their cheeks and some looked like they didn't care if they were even alive. I watched them with fear in my own eyes afraid of what was going to happen or what we were about to do.

We were ordered to stand in a straight line. The soldiers gave each of the men in my group a shovel. What were we doing with shovels, I thought.

"You are digging a hole. Each hole should be about six feet long and five feet deep," said a soldier with a loud voice.

A hole, I thought. Why were we digging holes?

"Turn around and start digging! Now!"

I turned around and began digging. This is easy, I thought. I can dig holes. I remembered what Asher had said about staying positive. I could dig holes every day

and be positive. I started humming a tune in my head and before I knew it I was smiling. I turned around, why wasn't the group of men behind us digging holes? I looked around to see the other men finishing their holes. I was just about done when a soldier came up to me and told me that if I didn't dig faster in the future I would be in the group with the men that were marching behind us. I really didn't see anything wrong with being in that group; they didn't have to do any work. The same soldier walked past each one of us handing us a piece of cloth.

"Each of you must blindfold one of the men in the back group," said the soldier. Why are we blindfolding them? I started walking over to the back group when I realized that the men in my group were hesitating. None of them wanted to walk over there. I backed up with them to see that the men in the group we were supposed to be blindfolding were shaking and crying. What was going on? Why were they crying?

"Move!" shouted the soldiers.

I found the closest man too me and walked behind him to blindfold him. He was screaming at me not to do it. My stomach hurt and I was starting to get a headache.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I have to do this."

"You do not know what you are doing son," the man said to me crying even harder now as I had gotten the cloth around his eyes. I didn't know what was about to happen. Next, the soldiers made us line them up in front of the holes we had dug. I was shaking just as bad as the man I was leading to my hole.

"Hold them steady!" yelled the guards. I tried hard too but I was starting to get dizzy. Guards stood in front of each hole with their guns pointed toward the blindfolded men. How could they do this?

"FIRE!" Shots were going off everywhere. There were screams and pleading as some of the shots had missed their targets. The man I was holding slipped out of my arms and landed in the hole. Another mans blood stained my clothes. My mouth collected saliva, like it does right before you get sick. The shots still rang through my head along with the mans cries begging me not to blindfold him. I fell to my knees and threw up inside the hole. I was so ashamed at what I had done.

"Fill back in the holes and hurry we need to get back to camp," a soldier said.

I was crying as I stood up to put the dirt back in the hole. How could I have done such a wicked and horrible

thing? When all of the men had finished filling in their holes the soldiers ordered us to get in a line so we could march back. I took one last look at the hole, "Sorry man," I said, my eyes filled with tears. We marched back to camp and it seemed to go by so quick. Did those men know that was their death march? Thinking about it made me want to get sick again. There is absolutely nothing positive about this place at all. Forget about what Asher said I bet he didn't have to kill anyone today. What's happening to me I thought.

When we got back we were sent straight to the lines for supper. After I got my watered down soup I looked for Asher. I couldn't find him anywhere. I quickly gulped down my supper and began looking everywhere for him. It was getting dark and we were ordered to head back to our barracks. I went straight to my bunk. What if Asher was killed? All the thoughts that were bogging in my head scared me.

"Jeremy is that you?" someone called from the top bunk.

"Yes it's me," I said standing on the ladder.

"Asher!" I said, "What happened to you?" he looked so sick and his right arm was in a sling.

"I didn't do my job the way they wanted me too."

"So they just hurt you?" I said completely shocked.

"Boy they are allowed to do whatever they want to us."

"What did you do wrong? If you don't mind me asking," I said.

"I shine their shoes for them. Since I'm older I can't do most of the other stuff and I was a shoemaker."

"You were a shoemaker?" I asked. Images of my mother and my sister popped in my head.

"Yes I was," he said with sadness in his voice.

"How did you end up here?" I asked.

"My wife is a German and I am a Jew. We thought since one of us was German then both of us would be safe. We were hiding a Jewish girl and her mother..."

"What were their names?" I asked interrupting him.

"I don't remember the woman's name but I think the little girl's name was Lily or Linda, why?"

"Was her name...Lydia? I asked.

"Yes I remember now it was Lydia."

"And the woman was her name Susan?"

"Yes," he said with a look of shock on his face, "Do you know them?" Immediately I fell to the ground. My eyes

were wide and I couldn't breathe. Asher looked at me with a puzzled look on his face.

"What happened to them?" I asked unable to move.

"The guards came into my house one day and had papers of my Jewish heritage. They said they had every right to do whatever with me as they pleased. The woman and her daughter came up to try and save me. I believe it was Susan who grabbed the soldier by the arm to try and get him to release me..." Asher tilted his head down.

"What happened to her?" I asked

"She was killed for assaulting a German soldier." That's it, she was dead. My mother was gone.

"And the girl..." I said.

"She was taken to a camp."

"Is she alive?" I asked with barely any hope in my voice.

"I...I don't know," he said. How can all of this be happening to me?

"How do you know them Jeremy?"

"It doesn't even matter," I said, "I need to get some sleep. Good night Asher."

That night I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning. I was thinking about my life and how much I wished right

now that I wasn't even alive. What about Lydia, I thought. What if she's alive and I'm giving up on her? No, I won't give up on her and I will get out of here and look for her. I will find her I promised myself drifting off to sleep.

CHAPTER 10

The next morning I woke up to gunshots again. This time they didn't scare me as much. I got out of bed as quickly as I could. I did not want any soldiers mad at me. As I was waiting in line I looked for Asher. I couldn't see him anywhere, and he wasn't in line either. Maybe he already had to leave this morning for his job. Something didn't feel right though. I couldn't dwell on it because I needed to figure out a way to get out of here. I needed to find Lydia.

We got in line for breakfast, which was the same nasty watered down soup as always. I drank it fast. I needed something else to eat. I was losing weight every day. I had to get stronger. Losing weight and becoming weak would

only result in death, and right now death was not an option for me.

I looked around at the other men still eating. This place could turn the bravest men into cowards. I could see sadness and the hunger in their eyes.

BANG! BANG! This time the gunshots startled me. I knew what that meant though. It was time to see what job I had today. I didn't think I could handle having the same job that I did yesterday. I stood up strong with my head back and my shoulders held high. I couldn't look weak no matter how much weight I was losing. The guards started numbering us off into different groups. It was the same guard who had yelled at me yesterday that stopped in front of me. He stared straight into my eyes. I thought I could feel the pain he wanted to inflict on me through his stare.

"Two," he said in a cold voice. I glanced over at the two's before I walked over there. It looked like the same thing I had to do yesterday. There was a group of old and sick men behind the two's. Wait, Asher's in that group! No, this can't be the same job. Asher's not weak, he...he's a shoe shiner. I turned to face the guard. He had an evil smirk on his face. Why would he do that? He can't kill Asher.

"Move," the guard yelled. I made my way to the group of men. I turned around, and looked at Asher. I would not do this. I couldn't live with myself if I killed him.

The marching started. They were marching to their deaths each and every one of them behind my group. I stared off into the distance, looking for a place I could grab Asher and run off to without the guards seeing us. There was nothing, it was solid dirt and sky for miles. I thought about asking some men to distract the guards. I thought about how they should do it, what they would say..

"Don't even think about it." I turned around.

"What?" I said. Beside me, a man with dark skin and thick bones had interrupted my thoughts of escaping.

"I have seen that look before. It doesn't work." He said.

"How would you know what I'm thinking about?" I asked him feeling a little aggravated.

"Escaping," he said, "Johnny Hikkens had that same look on his face once too. He got maybe three yards before all those guards went shooting at him."

"You don't understand," I said, "My friend's back in that line and he's going to die if I don't get him out of here."

"Oh I understand. Don't you think we all got family and friends who have died here? I'm telling you boy it won't work and you could get all of us killed too." He said.

Everything was a disappointment in my life lately. The family and friends I loved were dead. My only hope was Lydia, but I didn't see how I was going to get out of here or how I would find her.

We stopped marching. Today seemed to go by a lot quicker than yesterday. It was the same routine, the guards handed us shovels and we were ordered to start digging. Only this time when I was digging, I didn't sing a song in my head or smile. I knew what was going to happen and I felt like getting sick again. The worse part was having to do this to Asher. I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it or not. I started digging a hole. Each time my shovel hit that dirt it seemed to hit harder and harder and harder. I was releasing all of my anger out on digging that hole. So much for Asher's advice, I thought, look where it got him. I was so angry I could feel the blood rushing to my head. My hands were clutched too tight on the shovel that they started to break open and bleed, but I didn't feel it.

Now the burning passion inside of me to get out of this place yearned even more. Each time my shovel hit the ground I made a promise to find Lydia. Before I knew it I was standing inside of my whole. I had dug way too deep. I climbed out of my whole to see most of the men already done with theirs watching me. There were a few guards around my whole watching with shock on their faces. I looked around to see that my whole was at least four feet deeper than any one else's whole. Now came the part I hated the most. This was the part where I led men to their deaths.

BANG! The guns shot in the air which was our signal to walk over to blindfold the men. I stayed still in the line I was in. I wasn't going to walk over there. Every man in my group had started to blindfold the other men. Asher was the only man left without someone to blindfold him. I looked at him but I was too ashamed to keep looking. One of the guards came over to me.

"Get over there now and do your job!" he yelled. I stood there not saying anything I was too scared to say anything, but I would not move.

"If you don't get over there now and do what you're supposed to do, I will have someone blindfold you," he

said. I started shaking but I didn't want him to see my fear. Once again, I stood where I was, not moving. The soldier took his gun and slammed the end of it on my head. I fell to the ground. I wanted to shout out with pain but yet nothing came out of my mouth. If he had hit me any harder I was positive that it would have knocked me out. "Get up!" he shouted. I shook my head knowing that this could be the end. He lifted his gun ready to shoot me. I covered my face with my hands. I heard nothing though. There was no loud bang, not anything. I looked up to see the same guard that hated me when I first got here had his hand on the gun.

"What are you doing?" the guard with gun asked to the other one.

"I have got a better place for this one," he said with a smirk on his face. That same guard blew a whistle. Two huge guards came over to me and grabbed me by the arms, picking me up off the ground. My head was spinning at the thought of what they were going to do with me.

"Where am I going?" I whispered to the guards carrying me. They didn't speak at all they just kept marching with the same hateful look on their face. I started gasping for air. The feeling of not knowing what is going to happen to

you when you're being taken away by people that hate you is a scary thought. It's not a thought though this is real and it's happening to me.

CHAPTER 11

They threw me into my room and slammed the door shut. What was I doing in here? Why didn't they come in? My hands were shaking. I couldn't keep them straight. What happened to Asher, I thought? As if the fear of being alone wasn't enough, it was dark and cold. I couldn't move around because I couldn't see where I was going. I couldn't even remember how long I was in there.

CRACK! The door busted open. The guards swarmed in. This time my whole body was shaking and I couldn't walk. They all grabbed me and carried me out of my barrack. They were yelling something in German so I couldn't understand.

Clutching my arms they took me outside and loaded me into a truck already overflowing with many other men. There were twelve trucks out there and each of them had scared men in them.

My body ached from the shaking. As the trucks started driving away I began to sweat. This was it for me. I was going to die. My heart was racing. The insides of my body felt like they were going to explode. Knowing that you are about to come face to face with your death is hard to deal with and it's not pretty. I was shaking so bad, I noticed that I had wet my pants. My legs were drenched. I was panting for air now. The trucks halted to a stop. We were all unloaded from the trucks and told to go inside the stone building in front of us. It looked like an old church but I wasn't really paying much attention to details. One thing I did notice, however, was the chimney top on the roof. Black smoke was pouring out of it. I have never smelled anything so rotten. It was terrible. I can't even describe what it smelled like. I had never smelled anything like that before in my life.

The guards were trying to push all of us into the building, but twelve truckloads of people couldn't fit inside of that building. No matter how much they pushed us it wouldn't work. The last four trucks were ordered to wait outside. I was in the last one. Some of the men in the group outside were crying. Some were screaming and some were praying. I had stopped shaking. How were they

going to kill all of us? What were they going to do with all the body's that were in front of us?

An image of my sister was stuck in my head. I couldn't stop thinking about her. The promise I made. I promised I would do whatever it took to find her. I had to get out of here. There was no place to escape here and there were too many guards. I would have without a doubt been caught. What was I going to do? What could I do? I felt helpless and alone. I sat on the ground and put my head in my lap.

"I'm sorry Lydia," I said to myself.

I could hear tires coming up the dirt road. I lifted my head up and peeked around my truck to see who it was. It was just a bunch of guards. The few of them that got out of the truck first came running up the road. They were whispering with the guards that were with my group.

"What!" I heard one of them say.

I was curious to what they were talking about. I couldn't hear but I wanted to know. I stood up and began inching my way over to them. One of the guards blew his whistle right then and ordered us all that were outside to get back the trucks. We were told to do it quickly and anyone who held them up would be shot.

They always threatened us with their guns, but I rarely saw anyone get shot there when they were threatened. It was more of an unexpected thing when they used their guns, but I thought that it wouldn't have been a very good time to try them. I made my way back to the truck and jumped in. Men were jumping on top of people just to be able to get in their trucks in time. I couldn't feel the pain of people jumping on top of me because my adrenaline was pumping big time. Something was wrong, but it didn't feel like it was wrong for me.

The trucks were driving fast. Rocks were flying in the air from the tires hitting them so hard, and we were covered in mud from the puddles that splashed up. I felt like just jumping out of the truck but there were so many people on top of me I could barely move.

The truck drive seemed like it took hours. The trucks pulled into a train station. The guards blew their whistles once more and ordered everyone out of the station. People were fleeing as fast as they could and as they ran past us some of them spat on us. Some of them crowded around us to cuss and criticize us.

"Hurry up!" the guards yelled at us. We unloaded ourselves as quick as we could. There were no lines this

time. The guards just wanted us on those trains. There were fliers up all over the station and newspapers. I tried to read them but people were running all over the place trying to fit on a train so that the guards wouldn't shoot them. I was jumping onto one of the trains when something stuck in between the tracks caught my eye. I tried to jump off to grab it but people were pulling me in the train.

"I have seen that picture before! You don't understand I need to get it!" I screamed at whoever would listen to me. I ripped out of the grasp of whoever was holding me back and jumped off the train. There were still people running around trying to make their way on a train. I yanked the picture out from under the track. I stopped breathing. It suddenly felt like my whole world stopped and I was the only thing and only one in it. One single tear dripped from my cheek and hit the paper. I turned it over.

TO: Lydia

FROM: Jeremy

She was here. Lydia was here and she took with her the picture I gave to her. I remember she took the best one I ever drew of her. What if she is still here?

"Lydia! Lydia!" I called running all over the place. I banged on the windows of the train.

"Lydia!" I cried. There was no answer.

"Get on a train you stupid Jew!" I turned around to see one of the guards yelling at me.

"But I need to find..."

"I said get on a train!" he yelled again pointing his gun at me.

I started moving towards a train. I couldn't leave this place. It was the first step I had of getting closer to Lydia. What if she was around here somewhere? I couldn't just leave knowing she was within reach.

"I'll find you," I said to myself. I folded up the paper and stuck it in my pocket. I jumped on the very end of the train. There were no guards in the back; they were all towards the front. I knew what I had to do. This time not even a guard could stop me. I had to find Lydia.

There were people everywhere. The guards wouldn't even notice I was gone. The train started moving, and gradually sped up. I looked at the front of the train, the guards were too busy to notice me. I looked at the tracks. I knew what I had to do. With the speed of the train making the wind blow harder against my face, I put one hand

on my pocket with the picture in it, and I jumped. I rolled on the tracks. There were scrapes all over my body from the tracks.

"Hey, somebody stop him!" I turned around to see one of the guards on the train with his head out the window.

Before I could even think about it, I was running faster than I had ever before. I leaped over benches and ran through bushes. I had to make my way to the station counter. I was running and running...

"Jeremy?" A familiar voice called out. It was hard to stop because I felt like I had no control over my legs, but somehow I managed to.

"Melissa?" I said completely out of breath. I didn't really take time to look at her, but I did notice that she was wearing regular clothes and she still had her hair.

"What are you doing here?" She asked.

I ignored her question, it wasn't important. I took out the picture in my pocket.

"Melissa have you seen this girl?"

"Maybe... why?"

"It doesn't matter, just tell me if you have seen her!" I said raising my voice.

"Look, I'm sorry," I said, "I don't mean to be rude, but I am in a hurry and I need to find her."

"I have seen her and I know where she is." She said.

"She's alive?!" I asked with shock in my voice, but yet somehow with confidence because I believed she was alive.

"Yes." The look on her face told me she really didn't care.

"There he is!" I turned around to see a group of guards racing towards me. BANG! The bullet scraped passed my head and barely missed me.

"Come on!" I said grabbing Melissa's hand and running as fast as I could. As I was running, a million thoughts raced through my head. What if this was the end? No, I came all this way, and Lydia's alive. I won't die, I told myself. I won't...

Panic. I stopped where I was, and let Melissa's hand fall out of mine. Sweat beat down my forehead. In that moment, everything stopped. The world was moving in slow motion, and all I could hear was the sound of my heavy breathing. There she was. Lydia.

CHAPTER 12

"Lydia!" I called, but I couldn't hear myself talking. I saw her. She was right in front of me. Why couldn't I hear myself?

I turned around to see the guard's right behind me, but they weren't shooting at me. I turned to face Lydia. Everything started to move again. My world was no longer in slow motion. I could hear the yelling of the guards behind me. I could see the dirty, tear stained face of my sister. She didn't look like my sister though. Her hair was gone, and she was too skinny. She looked sick.

"Lydia," I said this time hearing the sound of my own voice. She didn't say anything, but I could see the tears in her eyes, and in them I could feel pain and torture. I started moving closer to her. The guards pulled me back.

"Let go of me!" I yelled.

"Shut up before we kill you!" They yelled back.

I tried to run to her, but the strength of both of the guards was too much for me. Lydia stood there crying.

"Melissa, grab her!" I said.

Melissa didn't move. She gave me a disgusted look and grabbed a gun out of one of the guard's belts. What was she doing, and why weren't they stopping her?

"Melissa?" I said my voice cracking.

"I'm sorry Jeremy," she said in a voice that told me she wasn't sorry at all. Slowly, she raised the gun, and aimed it at my face. I couldn't look at her. A million thoughts raced through my head. I wondered what my mother and father thought about when they were faced with death, if they were dead. Most of all I wondered how Melissa got involved with the Nazi's; she was in hiding when I was.

"When did you become like them!" I shouted. She smirked at me.

"How could you be like them!" I shouted even louder, breaking free from the tight grip the guards had on me. "Don't move!" she yelled, pulling the gun away from my direction and pointing towards Lydia. Lydia was still crying, but now even harder. I didn't move. What was I supposed to do? My face was burning from the anger that

boiled inside. My lips were tight, my eyes didn't blink, and I stared coldly at Melissa.

"You really didn't think I was a Jew did you?" she said laughing.

I didn't answer. I kept my glare on her.

"I thought you were smarter than that Jeremy. I guess I overestimated you."

"I guess you did." I said with a smile. I was not going to give her what she wanted. I knew both Lydia and I were going to die. I was not going to let the fear that burned inside of me show on the outside. If I was going to die, then I was going to be brave for my sister.

"You know Jeremy, I really liked you." She said.

"Me too." I said.

"I tell you what; I will give you a choice." I just looked at her.

"I am supposed to kill both of you, but since I already killed your father..."

"You killed my father!" Lydia said. She stopped crying and fell to the ground. I knew how she felt, my knees were weak, but I had to be strong. No matter how bad it hurt, no matter how deep the pain was, I had to be

strong. I looked at Melissa, still glaring with hatred, but I nodded, trying to fight down the tears.

"Since I killed your father," she paused to look at Lydia and smile, "here's what I will do. I won't kill both of you. Jeremy I will kill you in exchange for your sister's life."

Lydia lifted her head, "No," she whispered. The tears once again rolled down her cheeks. I knew what I had to do, and Lydia knew what I would choose. Melissa knew what I would choose. How was I to know she would keep her word? Dear God, I thought to myself, please have them take my life in payment of Lydia's. She doesn't deserve to die. Please let Melissa keep her word. With all the confidence I had left,

"Kill me," I said. I couldn't look at Lydia's face. I knew she would be begging and pleading for me not to do it. Melissa took the gun and put it to my head. Every time I thought I was coming closer to death, I panicked and thought about so many things. This time death was my only option, and I didn't panic or even wish I wouldn't die. The feeling of satisfaction swept over me. I looked at it like this; instead of I was moments away from being face to face with death. I was moments away from being face to

face with my Creator, and I would see my family again. God will watch over Lydia. I knew I was going to die, but Lydia's life would be saved and that is worth dying for. I looked at Lydia for the last time. The pain I saw in her eyes would soon be over, Lord willing.

"I love you Lydia," I said closing my eyes.

2 years later

The war has been over for two years now. I live with my teacher Mrs. Rolfings. She too lost everyone in her family. I am getting married next summer to a wonderful man who shares some of the same painful memories as I do. Each day I wake up and thank God that I am alive. It's hard not having my mother, father, or Jeremy, but God's grace has gotten me through some very hard times. If you were to ask me three years ago how painful the Holocaust was going to be, I would have laughed at you. I am a survivor and the horrific memories I have will never fade, but today I share my story with many. I share about the

life I once lived, and how it changed. The struggles and terror I went through. I talk about my family, but most importantly I share with others the last day I was in captivity. The most painful memory of all, it was the day Jeremy died for my redemption.