

Look Back

Esther's story

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Her feet pounded down the icy road as she replayed the events of the night. Esther had been shaken awake by her father, who, unlike his usual demeanor, looked worried. "Meyn takhter" he had whispered, using the Yiddish word for "my daughter". "The Gestapo are not relenting. I have given them lists, and lists of Jews to send to the ghettos in Lodz, but they are not satisfied. I am afraid they are after us now."

At these words Esther's blood ran cold, and her heart stopped beating. Us meant the Judenrat, the traitors, the ones who fed information to the Gestapo. The Jews who thought that revealing where their cohorts lived would help them survive these ominous times. Us meant her father. Esther hadn't hated the Germans. Until they shot her father when she was packing. Until they had slapped her mother, and taken away her little sister, Ruth. She didn't know how she had survived. Esther stopped to look at the corrugated walls, the crumbly sidewalks and the rusty gates of the unoccupied houses. And then it came. The ghetto.

She ran past it but that didn't stop the memories from coming back. The wailing of babies being separated, the sobbing of heartbroken mothers, faces, so many faces, all bleak and gaunt, waiting for their terrible fate. All imprisoned by her father. Esther took a deep breath and let it out. She began walking again until she heard a commotion, and saw a German soldier. Oh no. Not right now. She turned back and started sprinting away from the soldier, looking for a way to escape. *Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.* She nearly sank in a large pile of snow. "You! Stop there!" The soldier must have seen her.

She ran faster, her eyes scanning the barren wasteland... There! A turn! She turned, but she had been too hasty and her leg slipped. She landed hard on her knee. Esther winced as she stood, and started running. After a few steps her knee flared up again, and she was forced to walk. She wiped her sweaty hands on her plaid coat, and suddenly realized she could hear the soldier. *Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.* Esther hobbled towards the nearest building. The ghetto.

She paused. Uncertainty flowed through her veins, and fear squeezed her heart like a python. Tears blurred her vision as she remembered what this area

was. A waiting room for death. "Little girl... do not be scared... I am a friend..." The soldier singsonged. Esther wiped her eyes and ground up all her courage. "Little girl?" Esther ducked inside the ghetto, and gasped. It had aged since she was last here.

The edifice was large in structure, and was whitewashed. Some glass littered the floor, and there was a discernible stink near the back. She surveyed the room for a while until she heard a thump, and then a clatter. "Little girl? Are you here?" Somehow the soldier had guessed where she was and gotten inside. Esther's eyes darted around, searching for a nook, a cranny, anything, in the wired fence around the ghetto. Suddenly she remembered what her father had told her: "Around the back, near the sewage system there is a tear." At the time she had no idea what he was talking about, but now it clicked. Esther nimbly dashed to what she guessed what the sewage system was (by the putrid smell) and searched for the tear. She found it after a gut wrenching minute, and just barely slipped through, tearing her coat sleeve in the process and cutting her hand. She breathed a sigh of relief, and hobbled away from the ghetto.

Esther had been walking for hours now. Her 11 year old self needed to eat. Sighing, she fished out a morsel of bread from the small pack she had slung over her shoulder. She gnawed at it, savoring the feel of the bread on her tongue. As she walked, random thoughts bounced around in her head. She was so wrapped up in these thoughts she didn't hear the *crunch* of someone's boots. She whipped around, her blond hair flying. She came face to face with a young man. "Who are you?" she stammered. "Antek. I have been watching you. You have somehow escaped from the clutches of the Nazi's. Like many others your family has been stolen from you. We are the Resistance. Help stop this massacre. Join us." Esther nods. She never looks back once.