



The market square has changed. It used to be bustling with tinkers and gypsies and local peasants selling their wares, calling out mostly in Polish and Yiddish. In front of rows of dry goods stores, leather stores, a drug store, and several butcher stores and bakeries, fruits and vegetables and candies spilled out of kiosks and handmade wheelbarrows made from wooden fruit boxes. The smells were both intoxicating and nasty. Spices and onions and garlic mixed with yeast and sugar and woodsy smoke and the rotten tang of animal manure. Voices called out greetings, and I remember loud clanging from the blacksmith forge, the clopping of horses' hooves and the grinding of iron wheels on rounded cobblestones, and laughter and organ music.

But now, the market has only one bakery with long lines, one dairy shop, one butcher who is not allowed to sell kosher meat, just what little fresh meat he can get, and one dry goods store. My uncle, who is a cobbler, was forced to give up his shoe and leather shop when the Russians came.

All the shopkeepers are Ukrainian now. No more Jewish bakers making flat *matzoh* for Passover or braided *challah* for the Sabbath. No one travels from the valley to the market on weekends to sell anything beyond old musty used clothing and shoes. Black marketers knock on doors at night to sell their stolen or traded contraband at prices few can afford. The local police issue ration cards so what little food is available can be stretched to feed Kwasova, especially bread.

Mama comes back from the market one fall day while I am churning milk for butter, and I hear her yelling in the barn, where Papa is working. Mama never yells. I poke my head out the back door and hear something about "posters" and

“clothes off their dead backs.” When she comes back inside and slams down her willow basket, it is empty. I stay silent.

“I can’t go to the market any longer, Hanna, I have to send you on weekends. With your blond hair, you may get more from those bloodsuckers.”

“What happened?”

“I got there early to be first in line.” Mama paces back and forth. “Before the doors opened, a Ukrainian policeman I didn’t recognize came up to me and asked me what my name was and to see my ration card. When I said ‘Eva Slivka’ and showed him my card, he pulled me out of line and put me last. By the time I got to the counter, there was no bread left.”

It is getting harder to get flour to make our own kosher bread, so these rations are very important to us.

Papa, now at the open front door, wipes grease from his hands on a rag, then touches the *mezuzah* outside and lightly kisses his fingers. He ducks his head under the doorframe. “We can’t rely on this bread ration. I’ll see if Ivan will trade us a bit of flour for some apples. I do not like dealing with the Polish black market. They’ll take everything we own.”

We all stare down long and hard at the empty basket, as if we are in a dark fairy tale and something might magically appear.



That week, at school, I notice the Polish students sitting a distance away from the Jewish girls and whispering and looking at us sideways.

On Saturday, Mama wakes me when the night is just losing its hold on darkness and the stars are fading. I rub my eyes, reluctant to leave the warm bed.

She gives me the basket and the small ration card, brushes

her hand over my wavy bobbed hair, then lifts my chin with her fingers and looks into my eyes. Hers are brown, with gold specks in them, surrounded by beautiful long lashes that curl on their own. I know them so well.

“You will see things I don’t want you to see, but we need to feed so many mouths. Hold your head up high and ask for more.”



The walk to the market square is lonely at this time of morning. I feel tense with anticipation, wondering what is ahead of me. Crickets chirp briefly, slow and cold as I am in the cool air. Bats fly back to their nesting places. I listen to the sound of my leather shoes scuffing and crunching along the dirt road.

When I get to the market square, and pass by many empty storefronts, the shopkeepers are beginning to open the few stores that are still active. The bakery is still closed, though. Just a small group of six women wait in line in the street leading up to the front wooden steps. I will not be first today, but I will still be in a good position.

I take my place behind them with my ration card for 2 ounces of bread. They are speaking Polish, talking about lice. I tune them out and stamp my feet for warmth on the cobblestones. The line behind me grows longer and the air warms as the sun continues to rise high in the sky. I stop shivering, but I keep looking around for the Ukrainian policeman who had confronted Mama.

When the bakers open the double wood doors, their bells overhead ring from the movement, and the line starts to surge forward. It is then that I see what the women had been talking about, and why the schoolchildren had stopped sitting

near us Jews—against the grimy left front display window is a new, colorful poster. In red Polish letters, which look like they were painted on with a brush, it reads: BEWARE OF TYPHUS. AVOID JEWS.

In the center of the poster is a drawing of an elderly man, who looks like he is a Russian Bukharan Jew, wearing flowing blue-black robes and spectacles and their traditional pill box *yarmulke* cap. A long beard and mustache hang low, weighing down his sad face. He has *huge* oversized skeletal hands. To his right is a blue Mogen Dovid, a Jewish star; to the left of him, a purple skull. All over his robe are crawling larger-than-life pinkish lice.

On the right display window is another poster, all words: THE JEW, INCITER OF WAR, PROLONGER OF WAR.

The women in front of me say something about the posters being from Lwów.

*This must be what Mama was talking about*, I think. I can't help but brush off my dress, as if I were brushing off the pink lice, and I hold my head up higher, as the woman behind me backs away, leaving extra space between us. I recognize her, and I know she recognizes me—she knows I am the daughter of Abram Slivka, who fixes her husband's hay scales. My stomach churns and my face grows red. I have the self-protective urge to slap her. But I can't. She might turn me in to the Ukrainian policeman, who is now stationed on the sidewalk, watching the line.

Is he the same one who pulled Mama aside?

I begin to sweat. Beads form on my forehead and my armpits grow damp and I need to pee. It feels like forever until we make it up the stairs and inside the shop, past the rifle-carrying policeman who glances right over my blond bob

without a question. The women in front of me are turning over their orange ration cards in exchange for bread. It is then, looking over their shoulders, that I notice their cards are stamped for 5.25 ounces, about a half loaf of bread.

I look down again at my card. It clearly says 2 ounces! Anger boils in me again. Over the head of Mr. and Mrs. Zherdev, the Ukrainian bakers, is a crisp new poster of Adolf Hitler. It is pasted over the old, greasy one of Comrade Stalin—you can still see one red corner of his poster peeking out from where the flour paste hadn't held. I glare at Hitler's image.

I take a deep breath when I reach the glass counter, cross-hatched with scratches. I hold out my ration card and look Mrs. Zherdev in the eye, anger making me bold. I don't know where his name came from, but it comes to me at that moment: "Mr. Davydenko, who you know is the chief of police, asked me to tell you to give me double this card. He is a client of mine and Mrs. Petrovich."

I see her look at her husband. He squints his small eyes at me in the dimness of the shop, lit only by the sun shining in dusty motes around those horrible large, square Lwów posters that block out most of the light now.

He shrugs and calls up the next customer.

Mrs. Zherdev weighs out 4 ounces and puts the quarter loaf in my basket. I hold my breath till I get out the door, then try to shake out my fury by running, bread bouncing in the basket. I only stop once to relieve myself in the roadside bushes.

I can't say anything when I put down on the table the basket with a larger chunk of bread. Mama takes me in her arms. I just shake and shiver, too angry to cry.

"You are clean, my Hanna, you are beautiful," my mother's

singsong voice whispers into my hair, the hair that has gotten us more food to eat.

“You are worthy.”