

# CHAPTER 1

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THE SOUNDS GREW LOUDER AND CLOSER. AT FIRST THEY WERE MUFFLED AS IF WRAPPED IN COTTON WOOL, THEN THEY BECAME SHARPER AS GUNS CRACKED, HORSES WHINNIED, DOORS WERE SMASHED OPEN, FOLLOWED BY THE AWFUL SOUNDS OF PEOPLE SCREAMING. BUT IT WAS THE HEAT THAT WAS THE MOST ALARMING, WAKING LEAH, AS HOT AIR SURROUNDED HER, INVADING THE BEDROOM, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO BREATHE. THE BABY SHRIEKED, AND IN HIS COT IN THE CORNER, EIGHT-YEAR-OLD BENNY CALLED OUT IN TERROR, “MAMA, MAMA.”

MORRIS RAN IN AS LEAH JUMPED UP FROM BED, WHERE SHE HAD BRIEFLY SLEPT FULLY DRESSED. HER HUSBAND WAS ALSO DRESSED, HIS EYES RED-RIMMED, YELLING, “HURRY LEAH. THEY’RE HERE, THEY’RE BURNING HOUSES.”

HE PICKED UP BENNY, WHO CLUTCHED HIS FATHER’S NECK IN A DEATH-GRIP, HIS LITTLE BODY SHAKING, WHILE LEAH SCOOPED UP THE BABY, JOSEPH, HIS SKIN AND THIN COTTON SHIRT DRENCHED WITH SWEAT. OUTSIDE, FIRES CAST AN EERIE RED GLOW SHINING THROUGH THE OPENING IN THE WINDOW COVERING, AS THEY GRABBED THE BUNDLES OF CLOTHES THEY HAD PACKED EARLIER THAT DAY. SHE LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM ONE LAST TIME, SEEING THE FEATHER BED, BENNY’S COT, JOSEPH’S CRADLE, WOODEN SHELVES HOLDING THEIR FEW CLOTHES AND MORRIS’S PRAYER BOOKS, A PITCHER OF WATER NEXT TO THE BED, ALONGSIDE A PAIR OF ROUND METAL-FRAMED GLASSES.

LEAH AND MORRIS HELD THEIR HANDS OVER THE MOUTHS OF THE CHILDREN TO KEEP THEM FROM CRYING OUT. THEY CREPT OUT OF THE HOUSE, THEN SAW RIDERS ON HORSEBACK COMING CLOSER WIELDING

KNIVES, WHICH GLEAMED SILVER IN THE COLD, WHITE MOONLIGHT. DOWN THE STEPS INTO THE CELLAR UNDER THE HOUSE, STILL COOL, STILL SAFE FOR THE MOMENT. BEFORE LOCKING THE DOOR, MORRIS PILED BRANCHES AND TWIGS TO CAMOUFLAGE THE ENTRANCE.

IT HAD BEEN EARLY THAT MORNING, THAT THEIR NEIGHBOR ABRAHAM WOLF HAD POUNDED ON THE DOOR, WARNING THAT S ROVING BAND OF PEASANTS, AN ANTI-SEMITIC BAND CALLED THE BLACK HUNDREDS, HAD ATTACKED NEARBY VILLAGES, KILLING JEWS AND LOOTING WHATEVER THEY COULD. AN ATTACK ON KORITZ COULD AT HAPPEN ANY TIME, SO MORRIS REMAINED ON GUARD ALL DAY AND THEN STAYED AWAKE ALL NIGHT, IN CASE THEY CAME. LEAH NOTED THAT FOR ONCE, HER HUSBAND DIDN'T DEPEND ON JUST HIS FAITH IN GOD TO PROTECT THEM. THEY STORED FRESH WATER AND A BASKET WITH DRIED FRUITS, SOME VEGETABLES, A LOAF OF BREAD AND A JAR OF JAM DOWN IN THE CELLAR, ALONG WITH THE MOST PRECIOUS OF MORRIS'S PRAYER BOOKS.

NOW THEY HUDDLED CLOSE ON WOODEN CRATES IN THE CRAMPED CELLAR SPACE, THE WALLS SHAKING AS HORSES GALLOPED BY, THE NOISE CRASHING OVER THEM LIKE WAVES IN A STORM. IT WAS TOO DANGEROUS TO LIGHT A CANDLE, BUT LEAH IMAGINED THEIR FACES IN THE DARKNESS, MORRIS CHOKING ON UNACCUSTOMED ANGER CURDLING LIKE SOUR MILK IN HIS STOMACH, THE BABY STIFF IN HER ARMS, EXHAUSTED FROM CRYING AND LITTLE BENNY, STILL CLINGING TO MORRIS, HIS FACE BURIED IN HIS FATHER'S NECK.

LEAH WAS BITTER THAT THEY WERE PAYING THE PRICE OF IMPOSSIBLE CONDITIONS IN RUSSIA THIS YEAR, 1905. THE GOVERNMENT HAD FINALLY EMANCIPATED THE SERFS BUT THE PEASANTS HAD BEEN PUSHED OFF THE LAND THEY HAD FARMED FOR GENERATIONS, LEAVING MANY OF THEM DESTITUTE. SO THEY TOOK THEIR FRUSTRATION AND ANGER OUT ON THE JEWS, SINCE THE AUTHORITIES MADE SURE TO BLAME THE JEWS FOR ALL THEIR TROUBLES. THEN IN JANUARY, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE GATHERED AT THE WINTER PALACE IN ST. PETERSBURG BEGGING THE CZAR FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS AND AN END TO THE DISASTROUS WAR WITH JAPAN. BUT INSTEAD, THE CZAR LEFT THE CITY, LEAVING HIS TROOPS TO DEAL WITH THE PROTESTS. UNNERVED BY THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE, THEY FIRED ON THE UNARMED PROTESTERS KILLING HUNDREDS.

HERE IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE PALE, THE AREA WHERE THE GOVERNMENT FORCED MOST JEWS TO LIVE, LIFE WAS HARD, BUT IN TIMES OF REAL TROUBLE, LEAH THOUGHT, IT WAS ALWAYS WORSE FOR THE JEWS. NO MATTER WHAT THE REAL TRUTH, THE JEWS WERE USED AS SCAPEGOATS BY THE AUTHORITIES, WHO ENCOURAGED THE STATE NEWSPAPERS TO PRINT GOVERNMENT LIES WHICH THE PEOPLE BELIEVED. OUTRAGEOUS LIES LIKE THE BLOOD LIBEL, ACCUSING JEWS OF USING THE BLOOD OF CHRISTIAN CHILDREN IN THE MAKING OF THEIR PASSOVER MATZOS OR ACCUSING JEWS OF WORKING WITH THE JAPANESE TO DEFEAT RUSSIA IN THE WAR.

THIS DAY HAD STARTED AS AN ORDINARY DAY, BUT A HAPPY ONE, BENNY'S EIGHTH BIRTHDAY. SHE HAD SAVED AN EGG AND BAKED A SMALL CAKE FOR HIS SPECIAL BIRTHDAY BREAKFAST. HE TRIED TO SLIP BACK UNDER THE COVERS IN ORDER TO AVOID HIS DAILY CHORES OF DRAWING WATER FROM THE WELL AND FEEDING THE CHICKENS. IT WAS HARD NOT TO LAUGH AT HIS ANTICS. WITH HIS LARGE DARK EYES FRINGED BY LONG LASHES, HE RESEMBLED HER BROTHER DOV, EXCEPT FOR THE EARS, WHICH STUCK OUT LIKE THE HANDLES ON A MILK JUG.

TODAY WAS ALSO GOING TO BE MORRIS'S FIRST DAY OF WORKING AT HOLSTEIN'S MILL, KEEPING THE ACCOUNTS. HIS FIRST STEADY JOB, WHICH HE FINALLY AGREED TO TAKE, EVEN IF IT INFRINGED ON HIS ROUTINE OF STUDY AND PRAYERS. WHEN SHE AGREED TO MARRY HIM TEN LONG YEARS AGO, FANNY, THE MARRIAGE BROKER, NEGLECTED TO MENTION HIS FANATIC DEVOTION TO TORAH STUDY OVER WAGES. FAMILIES WITH MONEY COULD AFFORD TO KEEP A SON-IN-LAW AT HOME TO STUDY, BUT ALTHOUGH BOTH SHE AND HER FATHER VALUED LEARNING, HER FATHER COULD NOT AFFORD TO KEEP THEM. MORRIS HAD NO FAMILY OF HIS OWN, SO THEY HAD BEEN STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY ALL THROUGH THEIR MARRIAGE.

THEY COULDN'T LEAVE THE CELLAR UNTIL THEY WERE SURE THAT THE ATTACKERS WERE GONE. LOOTERS WOULD BE RANSACKING HOUSES LOOKING FOR ANYTHING OF VALUE. LEAH BURIED THEIR ONLY TREASURES, A SILVER KIDDUSH CUP AND SPICE BOX, WEDDING PRESENTS FROM HER FAMILY, UNDERNEATH THE CHICKEN COOPS IN THE SHED. HER STRATEGY WAS TO LEAVE AN ITEM FOR THE LOOTERS TO FIND. "IF THEY'VE SCAVENGED SOMETHING," SHE SAID TO MORRIS, "MAYBE THEY'LL BE

SATISFIED AND GO WITHOUT DESTROYING EVERYTHING.” SHE THOUGHT ABOUT LEAVING HER SILVER AND TORTOISE-SHELL COMBS, BUT THIS WAS A GIFT HANDED DOWN FROM MOTHER TO DAUGHTER FOR GENERATIONS. ONCE SHE HOPED TO GIVE IT TO HER OWN DAUGHTER, BUT BABY RACHEL DIDN’T SURVIVE HER FIRST MONTH AND NOW LAY BURIED IN THE CEMETERY OUTSIDE TOWN. THE DEATH OF RACHEL AND TWO OTHER STILL-BORN BABY GIRLS, REMAINED A WOUND THAT WOULDN’T HEAL, THAT TIME CONTINUED TO PICK AT, LIKE SCABS THAT CONTINUED TO PULL AT THE SKIN, EVEN THOUGH SHE WENT ON TO GIVE BIRTH TO BENNY AND JOSEPH. THE COMBS WERE SAFE IN HER APRON POCKET, AND INSTEAD SHE LEFT THE BRASS SAMOVAR, THE TEA POT STILL SITTING ON TOP, FILLED WITH STRONG TEA, HOPING THAT WOULD PLACATE THE ATTACKERS.

ANOTHER HORSE RUMBLED OVER-HEAD, SHAKING POWDERY DUST FROM THE CELLAR WALLS AND LEAH LEANED OVER TO PROTECT JOSEPH’S FACE AND BODY. THEIR HOUSEHOLD WAS A MEAGER ONE AND SHE JUMPED AT EACH SOUND OF DISHES BREAKING, PRAYING THAT THE OVEN MIGHT BE SPARED. SHE THOUGHT OF ALL THE FAMILY DINNERS SHE HAD COOKED THERE, EVEN THE SABBATHS WHEN MORRIS MIGHT INVITE A HOMELESS PERSON FOR *SHABBOS* DINNER, IGNORING THE FACT THAT THERE WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A TASTE OF MEAT FOR HIS OWN FAMILY.

“LEAH,” HE WOULD SAY AS HE USHERED IN SOME GAUNT-LOOKING OLD MAN IN TATTERED CLOTHES, IGNORING THE GRIM EXPRESSION ON HER FACE, “SET ANOTHER PLACE. WE’RE HONORED TO HAVE A GUEST FOR SHABBOS.”

SHE REMOVED JOSEPH’S SOILED DIAPER, WET THE BOTTOM OF HER SKIRT WITH WATER TO SPONGE AND SOOTHE HIS SKIN. WRAPPING A CLEAN CLOTH AROUND HIM, SHE UNBUTTONED HER DRESS AND LET HIM NURSE, FEELING HIS BODY RELAX, HEARING HIS BREATHING BECOME STEADY UNTIL HE FELL ASLEEP.

MORRIS CONTINUED PRAYING AND, TO LEAH, EACH WORD HE SENT TO GOD WAS A BETRAYAL OF HER. GOD DID NOT PROTECT KORITZ FROM THIS POGROM. THESE MURDERERS ATTACKED BECAUSE THEY COULD, BECAUSE CZAR NICHOLAS DIDN’T CARE TWO KOPEKS ABOUT A RAMPAGE THAT KILLED ONLY JEWS. SOLDIERS AND UNHAPPY PEASANTS ALIKE WERE ENCOURAGED TO CONSIDER JEWS AS RIGHTEOUS TARGETS FOR

SLAUGHTER. CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE JEWS WERE A LEGACY OF RUSSIAN HISTORY. IT HAD TAKEN JUST ONE FALSE ACCUSATION CIRCULATED IN THE PAPERS THAT JEWS HAD COLLABORATED WITH THE ENEMY TO START IT ALL OVER AGAIN.

“ENOUGH, MORRIS,” SHE SNAPPED, SHIFTING THE BABY TO HER OTHER ARM. “YOU SAVED US, NOT YOUR INDIFFERENT GOD.”

“HUSH, LEAH. IT’S NOT FOR US TO QUESTION HIM.”

SHE SAW HIM REACH IN HIS POCKET FOR HIS READING GLASSES, BUT THEN REALIZED THAT HE HAD LEFT THEM NEXT TO THE BED. IT DIDN’T MATTER, HE COULD RECITE MOST OF THE PRAYERS FROM MEMORY. HE WAS A GENTLE MAN; SHE APPRECIATED THAT QUALITY, BUT IT INFURIATED HER THAT HE COULD DEPEND SO COMPLETELY ON A DEITY THAT TOTALLY IGNORED HIM.

MORRIS OPENED A SLAT WHICH COVERED A TINY CRACK IN THE WALL HOPING FOR A LITTLE FRESH AIR. A SLIVER OF MOONLIGHT STREAMED IN, SHEDDING A LITTLE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. VOICES CONTINUED TO SHOUT AS SHOTS RANG OUT. THE SMELL OF SMOKE GREW STRONGER AND MORRIS QUICKLY REPLACED THE SLAT.

DESPITE THE NOISE, THE DAMP MUSTINESS OF THE CELLAR LULLED THE CHILDREN INTO A RESTLESS DOZING. EVEN MORRIS BEGAN TO NOD. BUT LEAH HAD NO SUCH EASY ESCAPE. HOW DID SHE GET TO THIS PLACE, THIS TIME OF HORROR? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THEM? WOULD HER FATHER AND BROTHERS EVER KNOW, GRIEVE FOR THEIR LITTLE LEAH? ALARMED BY EACH NEW SOUND, SHE WAS AFRAID OF WHAT THEY WOULD FIND WHEN THEY EMERGED FROM THIS HOLE IN THE GROUND. SHE RECOGNIZED THE VOICE OF A NEIGHBOR, MRS. RODINSKY, CURSING SOMEONE ON HORSEBACK, AS THEY RODE ROUGHSHOD THROUGH HER VEGETABLE GARDEN.

A SCREAM RIPPED APART THE NIGHT, WAKING MORRIS AND THE CHILDREN, THE BABY WAILING BEFORE EITHER LEAH OR MORRIS COULD CLAP A HAND OVER HIS MOUTH. SHE HELD HER BREATH, WHEN SUDDENLY THERE WAS A POUNDING ON THE CELLAR DOOR. NO ONE MOVED, BUT THE DOOR BROKE OPEN AND LEAH SAW THE OUTLINE OF A MAN IN A LONG MILITARY COAT, HOLDING A SWORD REFLECTING THE GLOW OF THE FIRES OUTSIDE. THE INTRUDER PUSHED INTO THEIR HIDING PLACE, CROWDING THE SMALL SPACE. BEFORE LEAH COULD MOVE EVEN HER

SMALLEST FINGER, BEFORE SHE HAD TIME TO EXHALE A WISP OF BREATH, MORRIS PUSHED BENNY BEHIND HIM, AS THE SWORD PLUNGED INTO HIS CHEST, HIS THIN BODY CRUMPLING FORWARD WITHOUT A SOUND. BENNY FELL WITH MORRIS, STILL CLINGING TO HIS FATHER'S LEG, HIS LARGE EYES WIDE WITH TERROR AT SEEING BLOOD STREAM FROM MORRIS'S WOUND.

LEAH'S BREATH CHOKED IN HER CHEST, BILE GAGGING IN HER THROAT, BUT SHE MADE HERSELF BREATHE WHEN SHE SAW THE SOLDIER RAISE HIS ARM, READY TO STRIKE AGAIN.

"WAIT, PLEASE," SHE CRIED, FORCING THE WORDS OUT OF HER MOUTH. "WAIT. SEE WHAT I HAVE FOR YOU."

SHE REACHED INTO HER APRON POCKET, TAKING OUT THE SILVER AND TORTOISE-SHELL COMBS, STRETCHING HER HAND TOWARDS HIM, SEEING HIS EYES LIGHT UP AT THE PROSPECT OF FURTHER SPOILS. "LET US GO, PLEASE," SHE SAID, HER FINGERS TIGHTLY CLASPING THE COMBS, WATCHING EVERY MOVEMENT IN THE MAN'S FACE, EVERY SHADOW PASSING OVER HIS EYES. BEHIND HIM THE MOON SHONE THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR. HE WAS YOUNG, NO MORE THAN TWENTY, SPARSE, DROOPING MOUSTACHES MAKING HIM LOOK EVEN YOUNGER, CHEEKS SPLATTERED WITH BLOOD, WHILE HIS EYES FIXATED ON THE COMBS. HE WAS PROBABLY THE SAME AGE AS HER BROTHER DOV THE LAST TIME SHE SAW HIM BACK IN YANOV, WHEN SHE LEFT TO MARRY MORRIS.

"THINK HOW BEAUTIFUL THEY WOULD BE ON YOUR SWEETHEART," SHE SAID, "OR EVEN YOUR MOTHER. TAKE THEM, BUT LET US GO, PLEASE." HOW SHE WANTED TO RIP OFF THOSE MOUSTACHES AND CAUSE HIM GREAT PAIN, BUT INSTEAD SHE SPOKE QUIETLY, SOOTHINGLY, AS IF SHE WERE A MOTHER COMFORTING A RESTLESS CHILD.

ANOTHER SOLDIER PEERED INTO THE CELLAR. "KILL THEM AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE." BUT THE YOUNGER ONE SEEMED MESMERIZED BY LEAH, AS SHE HELD JOSEPH TIGHTLY WITH ONE HAND AND SLOWLY RELEASED HER GRIP ON THE COMBS WITH THE OTHER. THEY STARED AT EACH OTHER FOR A VERY LONG MINUTE, WHILE LEAH SILENTLY PRAYED TO THAT GOD WHO NEVER LISTENED.

"NO," THE YOUNG SOLDIER FINALLY SAID. "I DON'T HAVE TO KILL THEM. THEY'LL PROBABLY STARVE TO DEATH ANYWAY." HE TOOK THE COMBS, WHEELED ABOUT ABRUPTLY AND LEFT.

LEAH LAID THE BABY DOWN ON THE QUILT AND RUSHED TO MORRIS, LOOKING FOR ANY SIGNS OF LIFE. HE BARELY BREATHED, BLOOD OOZED FROM HIS CHEST, SPITTLE STAINED HIS BEARD. IT WAS URGENT TO FIND ANNA VASHENKO, THE MID-WIFE, WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP. BUT HOW COULD SHE LEAVE THE CHILDREN ALONE IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS HORROR? SHE TOOK A CLEAN CLOTH AND PRESSED ON THE WOUND, BUT COULDN'T STAUNCH THE BLEEDING. SHE HAD TO FIND ANNA NOW OR MORRIS WOULD DIE.

"BENNY, PUT YOUR HANDS HERE AND PRESS HARD. I'M GOING TO GET HELP FOR PAPA." BENNY SLOWLY SAT UP, AFRAID TO LOOK AT HIS FATHER. "BENNY, DO WHAT I TELL YOU," SHE REPEATED STERNLY. THE BOY TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND PRESSED ON THE CLOTH WITH BOTH HIS HANDS.

LEAH CREPT TO THE CELLAR DOOR AND PEERED OUT, READY TO SLAM IT SHUT IF SHE SAW ANYONE MOVING ABOUT. THEIR HOUSE HAD BEEN ATTACKED, THE FRONT DOOR HACKED OPEN, THE WINDOWS SMASHED. A LITTLE WAYS BEYOND, SHE SAW MRS. RODINSKY SITTING IN THE MIDST OF HER UPROOTED GARDEN, THE MOON SHINING ON HER TEAR-STREAKED FACE, ARMS WRAPPED AROUND HER CHEST, SOAKED IN BLOOD. BUT LEAH COULDN'T STOP, NOT NOW, NOT IF THERE WAS A CHANCE THAT MORRIS COULD BE HELPED. SHE HAD TO FIND ANNA. SHE RAN THROUGH THE NARROW COBBLESTONE ALLEYS BETWEEN THE HOUSES, DOWN THE MAIN ROAD, ONTO A SIDE PATH, HEARING THE SOUNDS OF RIDERS AND HORSES RECEDE INTO THE NIGHT. SHE KEPT LOW AND OUT OF SIGHT, MAKING HER WAY PAST HOUSES WHICH HAD BEEN WRECKED AS IF A GIANT HAND HAD PLAYED A GAME WITH THEM, MAKING THEM FALL.

THE DOOR OF ANNA'S HOUSE STOOD OPEN LIKE A GAPING WOUND, THE SHED NEXT TO IT, EMPTY OF THE COW AND ALL THE CHICKENS. "ANNA, ANNA VASHENKO, IT'S ME, LEAH PERETZ. PLEASE, ANNA, DON'T BE AFRAID, I NEED YOUR HELP." THERE WAS NO ANSWER. SOMEONE ON HORSEBACK GALLOPED PAST AND LEAH RAN TO THE SHED, TRIPPING OVER A BODY, LYING NEXT TO A LEATHER SATCHEL, ITS CONTENTS SCATTERED. IT WAS ANNA, A LONG BLOODY GASH ACROSS HER NECK, HER BODY LIFELESS ON THE GROUND. THERE WAS NO SIGN OF LIFE. THIS GENTLE WOMAN, WHO HAD ATTENDED LEAH AT ALL HER BIRTHS, RACHEL, BENNY, JOSEPH, AS WELL AS THE TWO STILLBORN GIRLS. IN LIEU OF A DOCTOR, ANNA PRESCRIBED HERBS FOR ALL THE ILLS OF THE

VILLAGE.

“OH, MY DEAR ANNA, WHAT WILL WE DO WITHOUT YOU?” LEAH WHISPERED.

LEAH HAD NOT SEEN ANY NEIGHBORS EXCEPT FOR MRS. RODINSKY. NOW THERE WERE NO MORE SOUNDS OF GUNFIRE, OR SCREAMS PIERCING THE NIGHT, IT WAS STRANGELY QUIET. NOT EVEN A HOOT FROM AN ERRANT BARN OWL. THE WORLD WAS SILENT AS DEATH. WHERE WAS EVERYBODY? WERE THEY ALL DEAD? LEAH COLLAPSED NEXT TO ANNA, HER FACE WET WITH TEARS. SHE MADE HERSELF STAND, SHE HAD TO GET BACK TO THE CHILDREN AND MORRIS.

SHE SCOOPED UP ALL THE MEDICINES, HERBS, VIALS, STUFFING EVERYTHING BACK INTO ANNA’S BAG. ON THE WAY HOME A FACE PEERED OUT FROM BEHIND THE RUBBLE, BUT QUICKLY HID AGAIN AS SHE PASSED BY. THE AIR WAS ACRID WITH THE SMELL OF SMOKE. MANY HOUSES WERE MADE OF WOOD, WITH THATCHED ROOFS, IT TOOK ONLY A SPARK TO TURN THEM INTO BONFIRES. AS SHE NEARED HER HOUSE LEAH SAW THAT MRS. RODINSKY HAD SLID ONTO HER SIDE, EYES OPEN, STARING LIFELESS AT HER TORN-UP GARDEN. LEAH HELD HER BREATH AND GENTLY CLOSED THE WOMAN’S EYES.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS CALLED OUT WEAKLY, “LEAH, IS THAT YOU?” SOPHIA WOLF LIMPED TOWARDS HER, LIKE A FRIGHTENED LOST CHILD, HER HAIR UNCOVERED, EXPOSING HER SHAVED HEAD. LEAH HAD NEVER SEEN HER WITHOUT A WIG OR HEAD COVERING. SHE WAS LIKE A GHOSTLY SCARECROW MOVING TOWARDS HER.

“SOPHIA, ARE YOU HURT?” LEAH ASKED, ALARMED BY HER NEIGHBOR’S APPEARANCE. “WHERE IS ABRAHAM?”

THE WOMAN FELL TO HER KNEES. “ABRAHAM MADE ME HIDE IN THE HAYLOFT, WHILE HE WENT LOOKING FOR ISAAC. THE SOLDIERS KILLED THEM BOTH.”

“OH GOD, IT WAS A SOLDIER THAT KILLED MORRIS,” LEAH SAID. DID THE SAME BOY CONTINUE HIS KILLING SPREE AFTER SPARING HER AND THE CHILDREN? “COME WITH ME, SOPHIA. I HAVE TO SEE TO MORRIS. HE’S BADLY HURT.”

LEAH WENT DOWN THE CELLAR STEPS, SOFTLY CALLING, “BENNY, SWEETHEART, IT’S MAMA.” SHE FOUND HIM IN THE CORNER, COWERING AGAINST A LARGE BAG OF POTATOES, BUT STILL PRESSING THE CLOTH



AGAINST HIS FATHER'S CHEST.

MORRIS'S EYES FLUTTERED BUT DID NOT OPEN, HIS FACE THE COLOR OF FRESHLY GROUND FLOUR. "MORRIS," SHE WHISPERED INTO HIS EAR. "MORRIS, IT'S LEAH." SHE PRESSED HER OWN HAND ON THE WOUND, FEELING THE BLOOD THICK AND WARM ON HER FINGERS. MORRIS DID NOT RESPOND.

TAKING HER HAND AWAY FOR AN INSTANT, SHE EMPTIED THE BAG OF MEDICINES, DESPERATE TO KNOW WHICH SALVE OR POWDER ANNA WOULD HAVE USED. THE BABY WHIMPERED, SHIVERING ON THE QUILT, REEKING OF URINE. SHE DIRECTED BENNY TO GET ONE OF MORRIS'S SHIRTS, AND WHILE BENNY PRESSED AGAINST MORRIS'S WOUND, SHE SPONGED AND CHANGED THE BABY. THEN SHE TORE OFF A SMALL STRIP OF CLEAN CLOTH AND DIPPED IT INTO THE JAR OF JAM AND GAVE IT TO THE BABY TO SUCK ON. TURNING BACK TO MORRIS, SHE UNTIED THE SCARF COVERING HER HAIR, SPRINKLED A DARK POWDER ON IT AND APPLIED IT TO THE WOUND.

UNLIKE SOPHIA, LEAH'S OWN HAIR WAS UNSHORN, STILL THICK AND AUBURN, BECAUSE SHE HAD REFUSED TO SHAVE IT WHEN SHE MARRIED, REBELLING AGAINST THE ORTHODOX TRADITION. MORRIS HAD RANTED AND ARGUED BUT SHE SWORE THAT SHE WOULD KEEP HER HEAD COVERED AT ALL TIMES WITH A SCARF. HER HAIR WAS JUST ONE OF THE MANY ARGUMENTS THAT SHE AND MORRIS HAD RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING. FIRST IT WAS HER HAIR, THEN HER BOOKS, NOVELS THAT HE TRIED TO BAN. AND OF COURSE THEY ALWAYS QUARRELED ABOUT MONEY, HIS REFUSING TO TAKE A STEADY JOB, INSTEAD RELYING ON SPORADIC TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS. HE LIKED TO REMIND HER THAT SHE HAD CONSENTED TO MARRY A TORAH SCHOLAR. ALL THOSE SHARP WORDS SEEMED UNIMPORTANT NOW AS HE LAY MORTALLY WOUNDED AT HER FEET.

"BENNY, GO TELL SOPHIA TO COME DOWN AND REST HERE." BUT THE BOY HID BEHIND HER, SHAKING HIS HEAD. "DO AS I SAY," SHE SAID SHARPLY. "WE HAVE NO TIME FOR ARGUMENTS."

SNUFFLING, THE BOY CRAWLED UP THE STEPS. LEAH HEARD HIM WHISPER, "MRS. WOLF, MAMA SAYS TO COME IN AND REST." BUT SOPHIA REFUSED TO MOVE.

LEAH APPLIED NEW POULTICES TO MORRIS'S WOUND DURING THE

NIGHT, KEEPING HIM WARM, LISTENING FOR ANY CHANGES IN HIS BREATHING. SHE HELD HIS HAND, TRYING TO BE REASSURING, BUT THE WORDS DIDN'T COME EASILY, JUST THE PRESSURE OF HER FINGERS. SUDDENLY THERE WAS A LOUD GURGLING IN HIS THROAT, THEN, SILENCE. SHE PUT HER EAR NEXT TO HIS MOUTH, HOPING TO HEAR OR FEEL A WHISPER OF BREATH ON HER SKIN. HIS PASTY-WHITE COLOR TURNED BLUISH AS IF HE WERE BEING PRESSED UNDER ICE.

"MORRIS." SHE WHISPERED HIS NAME AGAIN AND AGAIN, HOPING TO ENTICE HIM BACK FROM THAT DARK, ICY PLACE HE HAD ENTERED.

BENNY SOBBED, HIS FISTS JAMMED AGAINST HIS EYES. LEAH AND THE BOY CLUNG TIGHTLY TOGETHER FOR A LONG TIME, UNTIL SHE TOLD BENNY TO KISS MORRIS GOODBYE.

"NO, NO MAMA." THE BOY SHRANK BACK AGAINST HER.

"COME, LET'S DO IT TOGETHER," SHE SAID. "PAPA SAVED OUR LIVES; WE MUST SHOW HIM OUR LOVE." SHE TOOK BENNY'S HAND AND GENTLY PULLED HIM TOWARDS MORRIS. FIRST SHE LEANED OVER AND PRESSED HER LIPS TO HIS FOREHEAD, THEN TOLD BENNY TO DO THE SAME. SHE WATCHED AS THE BOY BENT DOWN TO KISS HIS FATHER, THEN PULLED HIM BACK ONTO HER LAP, GENTLY CARESSING THE BOY'S CHEEK.

THERE WOULD BE NO TIME FOR ANY REAL MOURNING. JEWISH LAW INSISTED THAT THE DEAD BE INTERRED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND NOW FOR REASONS OF HEALTH IT WAS EVEN MORE IMPERATIVE. IN THE AFTERMATH, THERE WOULD BE NO ONE AVAILABLE TO DO BURIAL RITUALS, SO IT WAS UP TO LEAH TO CLEAN AWAY THE BLOOD, REMOVE HIS JACKET AND WRAP MORRIS IN HIS *TALLIS*, KNOWING HE WOULD WANT TO BE BURIED IN HIS PRAYER SHAWL. IF SOPHIA HELPED, THEY COULD ALSO BURY ABRAHAM AND ISAAC. TONIGHT, SHE AND BENNY WOULD KEEP WATCH OVER MORRIS'S BODY AND HONOR HIM BY RECITING PSALMS UNTIL IT GOT LIGHT. SHE TURNED TO PSALM 126, READING, "THOSE WHO TEARFULLY SOW WILL REAP IN GLAD SONG," BUT THE PROMISE OF RELIEF WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A MEANINGLESS JUMBLE OF SYMBOLS ON THE PAGE.

AS DAWN LIGHTED THE NEW DAY, SHE LEFT TO SCOUT A CART AND SHOVEL, BUT BENNY REFUSED TO STAY ALONE WITH THE BODY. SHE HELD HIM, QUIETLY COMFORTING HIM. "WE MUST BURY PAPA, BENNY. I NEED YOU TO BE BRAVE AND HELP ME."

HE FOLLOWED CLOSE AT HER SIDE AND THEY WENT OUTSIDE TOGETHER, WITH JOSEPH SLUNG IN A SHAWL, TIED ACROSS HER SHOULDER. AT THE CELLAR ENTRANCE, THEY FOUND SOPHIA IN THE SAME PLACE, ARMS STILL WRAPPED AROUND HER KNEES.

“SOPHIA, COME WITH ME. WE’RE GOING TO BURY MORRIS AND THEN WE’LL ALSO BURY ABRAHAM AND ISAAC.”

LEAH WORRIED ABOUT WHAT BENNY WOULD SEE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ATTACK, THE BODIES OF THE DEAD STILL LAYING IN THE MUD, WHERE THEY HAD FALLEN, ONE LOOKING AS IF HE HAD TUMBLED OUT OF HIS HOUSE, SLIPPING ON AN ICY STEP, STRETCHED OUT AT HIS FRONT DOOR.

SHE INSISTED THAT BENNY KEEP HIS EYES STRAIGHT AHEAD, AVOIDING LOOKING EITHER RIGHT OR LEFT, AS THEY WENT TO THE CEMETERY. IN ONE NIGHT HIS CHILDHOOD WAS OVER. ALL HER DREAMS OF GIVING HIM AN EASIER CHILDHOOD THAN SHE HAD HAD, MODEST BUT FILLED WITH BOOKS AND LEARNING AND LOVE HAD VANISHED WITH THE FLASH OF A SOLDIER’S SWORD.

SOPHIA LOOKED BAFFLED, BUT DID AS SHE WAS TOLD, FOLLOWING LEAH TO THE REMAINS OF THE SHED. A SHOVEL HUNG NEXT TO THE EMPTY CHICKEN COOPS AND THE CART WAS MIRACULOUSLY STILL INTACT. IN THE WOLFS’ BARN, LEAH FOUND A SECOND SHOVEL AND NOTICED THAT EVEN THOUGH SOPHIA’S HOUSE HAD BEEN DESTROYED, HER SMALL BARN COULD BE USED AS SHELTER

FILLED WITH GREAT DREAD, LEAH ENTERED THE REMAINS OF HER OWN HOME. THE DOOR WAS GONE, THE WINDOWS SMASHED, THE OVEN BATTERED AND USELESS, THE TABLE AND CHAIRS REDUCED TO KINDLING. ONLY A FEW CUPS WERE LEFT UNBROKEN. FEATHERS FROM THE RIPPED BED AND QUILT DRIFTED IN THE AIR LIKE SNOWFLAKES WHILE BENNY’S COT AND THE CRADLE, SO LOVINGLY CARVED BY MORRIS FOR THEIR FIRST-BORN RACHEL, LAY IN PIECES. SHE STEPPED OVER SLIVERS OF GLASS AND SAW THE TWISTED METAL THAT WAS ALL THAT REMAINED OF MORRIS’S GLASSES.

TEN YEARS OF HER LIFE HAD BEEN SPENT IN THE SMALL CONFINES OF THIS HOUSE. IT HAD ALL STARTED WITH FANNY THE MATCHMAKER WHO ONLY TOLD LEAH AND HER FATHER THAT THE GROOM WAS ELEVEN YEARS OLDER AND VERY LEARNED. FANNY TOLD MORRIS EVEN LESS, NOT

WANTING TO SCARE HIM AWAY BY MENTIONING HOW REBELLIOUS HIS BRIDE WAS EVEN AT SIXTEEN. LEAH TRAVELED TO KORITZ EXCITED BY THE CHANCE FOR A NEW LIFE. MORRIS MET HER CARRIAGE AND TOOK HER DIRECTLY TO THE RABBI'S HOUSE TO HAVE THE CEREMONY PERFORMED. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THEY HAD HAD THEIR FIRST ARGUMENT OVER THE CUTTING OF HER HAIR.

"I WON'T WEAR THOSE UGLY WIGS AND I WON'T SHAVE MY HEAD," SHE HAD SHOUTED. MORRIS SPOKE QUIETLY AT FIRST, THEN WITH GREATER FORCE. "IT'S AN OUTRAGE." THAT WAS THE PRELUDE TO THEIR FIRST NIGHT TOGETHER. PERHAPS THEIR MARRIAGE HAD NEVER RECOVERED FROM THAT FIRST DISPUTE. AN UNEASY TRUCE MADE THEIR DAYS POSSIBLE AND THEIR NIGHTS STONILY TOLERABLE.

LEAH AND BENNY, WITH VERY LITTLE AID FROM SOPHIA, USED THE CART TO TRANSPORT THE BODIES OF MORRIS, ABRAHAM AND THE WOLF'S SON ISAAC, REQUIRING THREE TRIPS TO COMPLETE THEIR SAD DUTY. SHE WAS HORRIFIED TO SEE THAT AT THE CEMETERY SOME OF THE HEADSTONES HAD BEEN OVERTURNED BY THE ATTACKERS AND QUICKLY CHECKED THE LITTLE CORNER OF THE GRAVEYARD WHERE BABY RACHEL WAS BURIED. THANKFULLY HER GRAVE HAD BEEN SPARED.

THE GROUND WAS WINTER HARD, THE WIND MOANED AS IF THE EARTH WAS CRYING OVER THE DEATHS. IT WASN'T EASY TO DIG THE GRAVES. BENNY WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH AND SOPHIA SAT HERSELF ON THE GROUND COUNTING OUT IMAGINARY UTENSILS, AS IF SHE WERE AT HOME MAKING AN INVENTORY OF DINNERWARE. WHEN IT WAS TIME TO LOWER MORRIS INTO THE GROUND, LEAH REGRETTED THAT SHE HAD NOT SAID SOMETHING MORE LOVING TO HIM BEFORE HE DIED. BENNY RECITED KADDISH AS SHE SHOVELED IN THE DIRT AND SHE WHISPERED "GOODBYE AND GOD BLESS," WONDERING IF THE DEAD MIGHT NOT BE MORE BLESSED NOW THAN THE LIVING.

BACK AT THE CELLAR AFTER THEIR LONG, DIFFICULT DAY, SHE SAT WATCHING JOSEPH, SLEEPING PEACEFULLY, SNUGGLING IN MORRIS'S SHIRT COVERED BY A WOOL SHAWL SHE HAD RESCUED FROM THE HOUSE. BENNY, EXHAUSTED BY HIS DEATH DUTIES, TOSSED AND TURNED, STRANDED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TEARFUL SLEEP AND ROILING NIGHTMARES. HE WOULD CRY OUT "PAPA," AND THEN WOULD BE STILL.

SOPHIA REFUSED TO ENTER THE CELLAR AND STAYED ALONE IN HER

BARN, PROPPED AGAINST THE STALL WHERE HER COW ONCE LIVED. SHE WAS TOO TERRIFIED TO EVEN LIE DOWN, PANICKED THAT THE MOBS MIGHT RETURN TO CONTINUE THE KILLING THEY HAD BEGUN THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.

LEAH FED THE CHILDREN AND TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO GET SOPHIA TO EAT. NOW SHE COLLAPSED IN A HEAP NEXT TO HER BOYS. ALTHOUGH SHE WAS DESPERATE FOR SLEEP, WORRIES ABOUT GETTING MORE FOOD KEPT HER AWAKE. THERE WAS LITTLE SPACE FOR ANY REAL COMFORT IN THE CELLAR, BUT THE BARN WAS TOO COLD FOR THE CHILDREN, SO SHE AND THE BOYS HUDDLED CLOSE TOGETHER, CONSERVING THE LITTLE BIT OF WARMTH THEY COULD MUSTER.