

## The Secret Passageway

I woke up hearing my mother call, “Jake, Jake.” I had just woken up from a deep sleep with great dreams. Anyways, I got up and walked down my family’s rickety stairs, through our hallway, and to the kitchen to have breakfast. After I made an omelet for myself, I started to wonder where my mother was. I called for her and she was nowhere to be seen, so I just kept eating breakfast, which tasted really good. When I was about done with my breakfast my mom appeared and told me we need to get ready to leave in a day or less if we could.

I had no idea what she was talking about, so I just did what I was told. I packed up all my school stuff, books, and other pretty important things. My older brother Matthew was still sleeping so I didn’t wake him up. Matthew has dark brown hair and light brown eyes just like me. Matthew was thirteen, two years older than me. My family is Jewish and at the time we lived in Berlin, Germany. My father, Thomas Klose was a very good soccer player who played with the country Ukraine. I didn’t usually see him because he had to be in Ukraine to practice and play soccer.

When I finished packing all my things, my brother got up. He asked me what I was doing, so I told him and he asked, “Why?” I responded by saying, “I don’t know, mother just told me to pack things.” Matthew then went downstairs to ask my mother what was going on and she responded. My brother then came back up the stairs and started to pack his things rapidly.

When he finished we told our mother and she said, “Good, we can eat now because I’m famished after skipping breakfast. Then, after we finish eating our lunch, we’ll leave.” I saw that something was bugging her and I was so confused, so when I asked why we had to leave, she answered almost tearing up, “The new general for the military has decided that people who are Jewish like us must be treated unfairly, so we must leave before they come here and hurt us.” At first I had no idea what she was talking about, but then I put two and two together and concluded what bad things were about to happen to us.

We got in our car with all our things by our side and started to drive off away from a place we called home.

After about a pretty long time we stopped to get gas for the car. When we finished getting gas I asked my mother where we were going to and she said, "Switzerland." I had never been out of the country so it was pretty exciting for me to go to a brand new one.

The next big thing that happened on our trip out of Germany was when we stopped at a train station. My mother said, "Pick up all your stuff, because if we want to get out of Germany without getting hurt or found by the military we have to get on this train." It was then I figured out why we couldn't just drive away from Germany. At the borderline of every country are officials that check your ID and your belongings, so if we drove by the borderline the officials would figure out we were Jewish and would take us somewhere bad. We had a better chance of not getting taken if we went on a train.

The train we went into looked pretty elegant and was really crowded, it seemed like you could see no open seat. I glanced at my ticket to see where our seats were and found out that we were going to be sitting in the last row, by a bathroom. I got to sit in the seat next to a window. I had brought a nice book to read for a while as we road down the rusty old tracks on a brisk summer day of 1940.

About 20 minutes after the train left the station, the conductor came asking for ID's and tickets, and when I looked at my mother's face I saw a frightened look. I didn't think that even one person on that train was Jewish, so I got ready to face the worst. When he came he asked, "Tickets and ID's please." Me and Mathew gave him our tickets and my mother gave him her ticket and he said, "Thank you but I need an ID otherwise" he pointed out the window. My mother tried to make up and excuse, but it didn't work and the conductor knew what was going on. He walked even closer to my mother and said up close to her face, "You think those excuses are going to work with me? Well you're wrong, I know you're Jewish because all the Jewish people who ever rode this train or other trains have been injured or gone to concentration camps.

I could tell the other conductors to throw you on a train to somewhere bad, but I'm not because I don't believe in Adolf Hitler. Give me your ID and your secret will be safe with me.”

At first I didn't know who Adolf Hitler was but then I realized he had to be the wretched man that my mother was talking about. I had heard about this bad guy at my school a lot of times, and heard how many kids had dropped out of school because they had to move for being Jewish. I guess I never thought or wanted to admit the fact that this could happen to my family and I. I also couldn't believe that first of all nobody else paid much attention and second of all that the conductor wasn't going to send us off to probably a dreadful place.

“NEXT STOP, ZERMAT” were the very loud words that woke me up from a delightful sleep on the train. I didn't even know I was sleeping but I guess I dozed off after the conductor situation. Anyways, my mother asked with her kind voice, “Jake, are you awake? Are you okay?” Plus, you have to get up in the next 5 minutes, our stop is next. I got up and saw a dark spot on Mathew's shirt where my mouth was. Mathew had also fallen asleep, so my mother woke him up and he said, looking at the dark spot, “Eww, that is so disgusting.” He also told me that I had fallen asleep on the windowsill just a bit before the borderline of Switzerland and Germany. Mother told me that it looked really fancy and the streets were crowded with cars and civilians. She also said that Mathew fell asleep at about the third stop, some 30 minutes after the crossing between countries.

After the train stopped, a bunch of people including us got off. We first had to get our bag. As we got our luggage, I asked mother where we would stay. She answered saying, “We are going to a place where some friends of mine live.” She also said, “It is only 15 blocks away from here.” I know most people would think that my mother is crazy by saying “It is only 15 blocks away”, but the truth is that my family walks a lot because we don't have a car. We are used to walking, running, and all types of transportation using your feet. Once, we walked 33 blocks in the rain.

After all that walking, we arrived at my mother's friend's house. It was one story high, and my mother told Mathew and I not to complain. We rang the doorbell and heard “bang,

bump” coming closer and closer to us. I had to admit I was pretty nervous and had a bunch of questions in my head, such as, is my mother’s friend a woman? Is she nice? What does she look like? Then the door opened just a crack and I saw a blue eye peeking through it. The next thing we heard was, “Mezut its okay it’s them, they’re here.” Then the door finally totally opened up and the woman said, “Meliva” (my mother) and then my mother said “Tina!” Tina looked at me next and said “Hi Jake” and “look at those beautiful sparkling eyes.” At first I wondered about how she knew my name, but then I realized that I had seen Tina’s blond hair, blue eyes, and long nose before. Then it came to me, Tina was my mother’s best friend from her childhood. Tina had been to visit us every year around the holidays up until I was about 6 years old. After thinking about all that I realized I had totally zoned out and that Tina had asked me how I was and if I remembered her. I felt a bit of a nudge on my right arm from my mother, and I responded by saying, “Hello, I do remember you and I’m doing well, thank you. Are you?” She then said, “I’m doing just fine, thank you, you’re such a gentleman.” Then she went to Mathew and said, “Wow, it’s amazing how much you’ve grown!! You’re almost taller than me now.” At this, I couldn’t help myself from chuckling because Tina was not tall at all, if anything she was pretty short, so she had kind of insulted Mathew, but he didn’t seem to notice it, so he didn’t look at me or mother.

When we got into Tina and Mezut’s house I observed all the beautiful and descriptive art they had swaying on the walls of the rough, light red brick wall. I saw only one bedroom, but they told us not to worry because there was an old storage room that doubled as a bedroom where we could sleep in. The house was a nice little place from inside and out.

At about dawn we went outside to get a breath of fresh air and to find out about all our surroundings. I could see only a bit of daylight peering through clouds that were like an unstoppable wall trying to block out all the happiness the sun brings in my life. The wall was similar to everything trying to hurt me, and the sun was the only joviality left in it. I could see so many pretty things around me that I totally forgot about leaving what I called home, my friends, Adolf Hitler, and my father not being there.

The next day felt bright and joyful because when I got up, I could smell the fresh scent of pancakes, French toast, sausage, bacon, and muffins. I had a great feeling not only because of the food, but because I had slept really well. Of course Mathew was still sleeping and snoring. My mother, Mathew, and I had slept together on a couch that had transformed into a big bed. Suddenly, I heard a ding-dong which sounded like the doorbell. I looked at Mathew to find him still asleep. I walked out the bedroom doorway to my mother and she said, “Hello sleepy head, do you feel good after your long sleep?” I said, “Yes, do you?” “Yes I do, thank you” answered my mother. Then, Tina came back with mail, which explained the doorbell. Anyways, she had a huge white letter sent to my mother with no return address on it. I walked and sat down next to her and tried to see what the envelope read, but my mother pulled it out of sight. When my mother finished reading it, she started to cry. I asked her what happened, but she wouldn’t say, so the next thing I knew, I saw my brother ripping the envelope out of my mother soft hands. I got up and tried to read it, but Mathew didn’t let me see it. I asked my brother what happened after he gave it to Mezut and Meliva, but he wouldn’t answer. I turned around and saw my mother with salty, sad tears rippling down her face.

Later I would find out that my father had died in a concentration camp. Apparently the German soccer team played the Ukrainians and the Ukrainians beat them. The Germans got so angry and embarrassed by this, they took the Ukrainian soccer players to concentration camps and killed them. One thing the letter said, was that the Ukrainian soccer team fought so hard, that they didn’t care what would happen to them. They played their hardest for their country, Ukraine, because they thought that Germany could take everything away from them, but not their pride for themselves and their country. I thought about this, and first cried because of the news of my father’s death. Sometimes you have to let it all out because there’s only so much you can take in. Later, after I was done crying I reread the letter and I was stopped at WE THE UKRAINIAN SOCCER TEAM. I paused because it said WE, which meant the person who wrote this letter was on my father’s soccer team and had either escaped dreadful things, or else the person had sent this letter right before he died. That is where I am now; I have just read the letter for the second time and realized the significance of the WE. I am very proud of my father for what he did for Ukraine and for my family, but I wish I had been able to see him longer. The letter made me sad, but at the same time taught me something that I will never forget. Even

when everything seems to be really bad, there is always hope. With his last game, my father taught me that, even though things have been horrible for our family up until now, the war will end and the tables will turn in our way, soon, hopefully.