A Night Divided by Jennifer A. Nielsen

We went as carefully as spies, through dark back alleys, walkways too narrow to be used as roads, and even through unlocked doors of other people's apartment buildings. The final crossing into the alley was our most difficult, with a long run from one hiding place to another. I wanted to split up, so that if I didn't make it, perhaps my mother would have a chance, but she only grabbed my hand and pushed me into the street as she hurried along at my side. I saw a woman in the window of an apartment overhead reading a book. When we were in the center of the street she looked down right at us. I froze for a fraction of a moment, wondering what she might do, but she only pulled the shade for her window and then switched off the light. I thought of the proverb "to see no evil" and hoped it would follow with the woman also refusing to speak any evil. Before I knew it, we were inside the alley.

From there, we ran until my garden came into view just ahead. How beautiful it seemed to me then, how deadly. The irrigation ditch that bordered the garden patch would get in our way, slowing us, but I hoped it wouldn't have much water this late at night.

"You have to jump the ditch," I explained to Mama. "And we collected a stack of rocks to the right of it. So just follow me, exactly where I go."

Her hand pressed against my back. "Whatever happens, you keep running, Gerta. Keep running and don't look back for me." Then she pushed me forward.

There was nothing more to say. We ran.

By now, I knew the land so well I could've run it with my eyes closed, and on this dark night, I might as well have done just that. The ditch was narrowest to my left, and I took that way. I jumped it easily, but Mama missed the bank and splashed in with one foot that became lodged in the mud. No matter what she had said, nothing would make me leave her behind, so I came back and grabbed her hand to help her back onto hard ground. We continued running, and suddenly lights blazed on in the watchtower ahead of us.

Mama and I dropped to the earth like falling timbers. Even without being aimed our way, the lights still brightened the garden considerably, casting everything in long shadows. They swooped up and down the Death Strip in their usual path and then began to turn our way. I knew this routine. I'd seen it before. Along with other area wall, the lights would survey this garden patch next. We'd be spotted and our position called out to the Grenzers, still searching for us on the streets. We had less than a minute to get all the way to the building.

We ran, so fast that my lungs ached and my head pounded. Rocks had gathered in my shoes, but I barely felt them. We dove against the bricks while the watchtower light swept down onto our field. It stayed there for a long time, highlighting the shovel I had placed in the dirt earlier that day. That shovel was our monument to freedom, even if nobody else knew it.

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