

A girl's fate is in
the hands of Hitler's
favorite filmmaker.



The
EXTRA

Kathryn
Lasky

The Extra

KATHRYN LASKY



CANDLEWICK PRESS

*For the victims of Nazi persecution, including the
Romani people of eastern Europe*

VIENNA

Early Autumn 1940



“Disappeared? What are you talking about? People don’t disappear. She just went someplace.”

“So where do you think Mila went? Why wasn’t she in school? Today of all days, recitation day. She had been practicing forever. She was sure to get the prize.”

“Maybe she’s sick.”

“Mila sick? Never — she’s healthy as a horse. And even if she is, she would have dragged herself to school. No — something’s fishy.”

Lilo shut her eyes. If only Hannah didn’t live in the same neighborhood. Then they wouldn’t have to walk home together. She was always thinking the worst. It was too depressing. There was something slightly perverse about her. She seemed to almost enjoy bad news. There was always this “I told you so” attitude.

“I think the Nazis got her,” Hannah said. “Your fingers still purple?”

Two weeks before, Lilo’s family and all the other Gypsies over the age of fourteen in Vienna had been required to report to the police headquarters to be fingerprinted. It was all part of the Nazi law, the Nuremberg Laws. Now the Nazis knew who they were and where they lived. That was frightening.

“Uh . . .” Lilo hesitated. “I really haven’t tried to wash it off.”

“Lilo! Are you telling me you haven’t bathed in two weeks, washed your hands in two weeks?”

“No, of course not!”

“Well, I can see they are still purple.”

“So why did you ask?”

Hannah shrugged. “Well, I have tried to get it off. My mum, my dad, my brother, and I have tried everything — spirits of camphor, nail-polish remover mixed with scrubbing salts. Nothing works.”

Lilo took a sharp left. “Hey, where you going?” Hannah said. “Home is straight ahead.”

“My father’s shop. I forgot he wanted me to stop by.”

“All right, hope I see you tomorrow. I mean I hope we both see each other tomorrow. Could be you. Could be me.” She shrugged again.

“Maybe Mila will be back,” Lilo replied.

“You know she’s not the first to disappear. An upper-grade girl, Zorinda, is gone, too.”

But Lilo didn’t want to hear any more of it. The church on the corner ahead marked the intersection of the street they were on and the one for her father’s shop. Kirchestrasse was a cobbled lane more than a street. She rushed down it and turned in under the sign of the clock. On the window was a seal, the seal of the Imperial Clockmakers Guild of Vienna, with three stars designating him as a master clockmaker and licensed dealer in antique timepieces.

“Papa!” she called out as she came into the small shop that was not much bigger than a closet. A chorus of ticking clocks and all kinds of watches greeted her. The sounds of the timepieces stippled the air.

“Papa!” It was more of a yelp than a cry. The shop was open, but he wasn’t there.

“Papa!” she now bellowed. She heard footsteps.

“What in the world!” Her father came through a back door.

“Where were you? I was so worried.”

“I’m fine — I’m here. What were you worried about? Can’t a fella take a leak? I just went to the toilet.”

She smiled. Everything was all right. Her father stood before her, the little green eyeshade he always wore pushed up, the jeweler's loupe hanging on the black ribbon around his neck, his trousers tucked into his vest so it would not interfere as he took apart and put back together all manner of watches and clocks. His fingers were still purple, too, she noticed.

"Papa, do you have any of that lubricating oil you use for the escapement wheels?"

"Sure, but what do you want with that?"

"I had an idea that maybe if we mixed it with alcohol, we could remove the stains on our fingers."

"Doubtful, but if you want to try, go ahead."

She stood over a small basin and poured the oil first and then the alcohol. "Can I use this sponge?"

"Sure. I'll be finished here in a couple of minutes. Then I just have to pack up a few things to take home to work on. The baron is coming by tomorrow for his watch."

"The tsar's watch."

"That's the one."

"Must be very valuable," Lilo said. She had now forgone the sponge and took up a wire brush that her father often used for cleaning his tools. She began scrubbing harder. "Ouch!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

A tiny bead of blood popped up where she had been scrubbing. One of the wires must have stuck right through her skin. *Great, she thought, I'll probably get blood poisoning now from the damn purple dye going directly into my veins.*

Five minutes later, they were walking out of the narrow street and onto a broader avenue. "Feels like summer, doesn't it?" her father said.

"If only!" Lilo sighed.

"Don't worry. Summer will be here sooner than you think."

"It seems like a tease," Lilo said.

"What?"

"You know, when it's warm like this, but the days are growing shorter so fast. It's nine more months until summer, Papa."

"Ah, it will go quickly."

"Look at this!" her mother said as they came into the apartment. She waved a photograph in her hand. "From Uncle Andreas."

"Oh, let me see! Let me see!"

It was a picture of Lilo on Cosmos, the beautiful Lipizzaner. Suddenly summer seemed further away than ever. And Piber as far as the moon. Her uncle Andreas was the head trainer at Piber, the stud farm for the famous Spanish Riding School of Vienna. And every year they visited him for two weeks. With her uncle's coaching, she had learned to ride. It was on Cosmos's long back that she had mastered the first movement of the White Ballet, a classic in the Riding School repertoire. In Vienna only men rode the horses, but at Piber women were allowed to hack the old stallions that had been retired from stud services. She set the photograph on the table, propped up against a flower vase. Her mother came over and ran her hand across the back of Lilo's head. "Lovely picture, isn't it? Much better than the drawing I did of you on Cosmos."

"No, Mama, that's not so. You were trying to catch me when I was doing the first set of the dance."

steps. That was harder. Here Cosmos is standing still.”

“Much schoolwork?”

“Some.”

“Some?”

“Some, yes. That means between zero and much.”

“Well, you should get started,” her mother said, and gave her a pat on the head.

But it was hard to get started. The window was open, and a soft breeze blew through the lace curtains, sunlight casting an embroidery of shadows on the polished table. It was as if the low-angle setting sun of the autumn was determined to be remembered and make a show of itself. She traced the shadow design lightly with her pencil, careful not to mark the table. She set down the pencil and examined the stains on her fingertips. Dared she even hope about Piber?

Had her uncle Andreas been fingerprinted as well?

“Lilo!” her mother called. “Are you daydreaming?”

“It’s too hot to study.” Lilo looked at her parents. “There are kids out there swimming in the canal.”

“Must be Roma girls,” her mother muttered.

“Mama!” Lilo complained. “Look at Lori — she’s Roma. You love Lori. She doesn’t dress racy. She doesn’t wear makeup. She is one of the smartest girls in the class, and her family does not travel around in a caravan. They live in an apartment twice the size of ours.”

“She’s an exception. And I bet you there’s Sinti blood in that family somewhere.”

Lilo sighed. Sometimes her mother was so narrow. “Look at Papa — he plays the violin at the best restaurant. Sinti aren’t supposed to be musical, remember? Mr. Gelb is begging him to play more nights. Says he’s better than Molder, who is Roma. So for all you know, we might have some Roma blood!”

“Lilo!” her mother exclaimed. “Fernand, did you hear what your daughter just said?”

“What?” he answered distractedly.

Lilo looked at her father. He was bent over the escapement wheel of the priceless antique watch of the tsar.

“She said maybe you have Roma blood, since you play the violin so well.”

“Hmm, that’s interesting.” He was completely absorbed filing the teeth of the wheel. Lilo liked to hear the rasp of the file.

It was the rotation of the escapement that powered the timekeeping element. Her father wound it now and set it down to give it a try. A new sound. A tiny ticking as the wheel turned, allowing the gears to move, or “escape” a fixed amount with each tooth of the wheel. He’d fixed it! In some way to Lilo her father was a magician. He could fix time. Manipulate it. Save it!

Without the escapement, time would stop or perhaps run away, Lilo wasn’t sure. When her father had explained this to Lilo when she was very young, she had imagined time running off like the gingerbread man. The tune and the lyrics began to run through her head now.

Run, run, run as fast as you can.

You’ll never catch me — I’m the gingerbread man.

I ran from the baker and from his wife, too.

You’ll never catch me, not any of you.

The baker made a boy one day,

Who leaped from the oven, ready to play.

He and his wife were ready to eat

The gingerbread man who had run down the street.

She always imagined pieces of watches — the gears, the jewels, the numbers on the face — running willy-nilly down the twisting streets of Vienna.

The ticking of two dozen or more timepieces chipped away at the quiet of their apartment. But there was also one other small sound that could be heard: the *puk . . . puk* as her mother pinned down bobbins of thread on a pillow for a new part of a lace design.

“What are you working on?” Lilo asked.

“Bridal veil.”

Lilo got up from the table, leaving her math book open to the last problem. She walked over to the corner where her mother was working.

“Oh, it’s beautiful, Mama.”

Her mother looked up and smiled. “Thank you, Little Mouse.”

Lilo made a face. “Mama, I am almost sixteen. How can you still call me Little Mouse?”

“It’s a mother’s prerogative. You can be fifty years old and I’ll still call you Little Mouse. Stay there.”

“So there,” Lilo repeated with a sigh. “Who’s it for? Someone rich?”

“Of course. Someone poor couldn’t afford this. It’s modeled after, or rather, inspired by, the veil that Princess H el ene of Orl eans wore when she married the duke of Aosta in 1895,” Lilo’s mother explained.

Lace trading was a popular profession among Sinti women. And lacemaking was an ancient craft practiced in Europe since Roman times. To know lace was to know history. And Lilo’s mother knew lace. Some lace traders went door to door. Not Bluma Friwald. She dealt with fabric shops and high-end ladies’ seamstresses and clothing boutiques, as well as fine table-linen stores and, of course, bridal fashion designers.

“Can I wear that when I get married?”

“Are you asking me to save some for you?” Bluma lifted her eyebrow as she looked at Lilo.

Lilo nodded.

“You know what you could buy with three meters of this, which is, by the way, a fraction of what Princess H el ene wore?”

“What?” *What will it be this time?* Lilo thought. *A month at the fanciest spa? A season ticket to the Opera House? A Leica camera?* It was a game she and her mother played.

“Maybe a Stradivarius,” her father said with a chuckle as he bent over the watch with his jeweler’s loupe. Her father had a good violin but not a Stradivarius, considered the finest kind of violin ever made.

“Your schoolwork almost done?” her mother asked.

“Yes, almost. Can’t we go out for a walk along the canal or, better yet, to a movie at the Palace?”

“What’s playing?” her mother asked. “If it’s *Morocco*, please no, Lilo. We’ve seen it five times already.”

“No, Mama, just four, and it’s not *Morocco*. It’s *The Holy Mountain*.”

“Ach, your father’s girlfriend, Leni Riefenstahl!” Bluma laughed. “She’s Hitler’s favorite filmmaker, Fernand. Are you sure she should be yours?” She winked at Lilo. “It’s an old movie. Wh

are they bringing it back?" she asked.

"~~She should stick to those romantic mountain films,~~" said Fernand. "~~And stop working for Hitler.~~"

"No kidding," Bluma replied acidly. She focused very hard on tying a knot called the double rose, although it was not that complicated. Her jaw was clenched as if she feared she might say more.

"And how was school today, Lilo?" The studied casualness of Bluma Friwald's voice betrayed her anxiety. Lilo heard her father set down the tiny forceps he used to pick up the ruby jewel bearings from the balance wheels in the watch. A thick tension gripped the air.

"Fine." Lilo paused and thought of Mila but said nothing.

A year before, the Austrian government had started barring Gypsy students from public schools along with Jewish children. But so far, despite the fingerprinting, no Gypsy children had been barred from the school Lilo attended.

"You see?" Her father rose from his chair and, putting his hands on his hips, stretched back to ease the tension from sitting all day long. "What did I tell you? I'm still playing tonight at the cafe. They're not going after Sinti. Street musicians, yes. But a Sinti playing in the most expensive restaurant in Vienna? Not a chance."

"Be sure to thank Herr Gruniger for the lovely *Zwetschgenkuchen*." Bluma nodded toward a tart with slices of rosy plums layered on top as perfectly as fish scales. The pastry chef from the Cafe Budapest often sent pastries home for the family.

Lilo wanted to believe her father's words. But Hannah's words came back to her. *Mila sick? Never* — *she's healthy as a horse*. And what about Zorinda? Two kids out did not mean that Gypsies were barred from her school. They were just out, absent. But there were always rumors. In a sense, the rumors did as much damage as the ordinances themselves. There were rumors that many Gypsies from Burgenland, Austria's easternmost province, had been deported to internment camps as part of something called the work-shy program. Work-shy? What a strange term it was. No one could even describe her parents as work-shy. Herself possibly. Suddenly she no longer was inclined to go out for a walk.

"Are we going out, or aren't we?" her father asked, rolling his shoulders up to get the kinks out.

"Oh, I just remembered I have some more schoolwork to do."

She took a book from her bag. But it wasn't really schoolwork. So she supposed she was work-shy. It was a forbidden copy of a German translation of *Huckleberry Finn* with a different cover on the back. Mark Twain and all his works had been banned, even burned at the great book burning in Berlin several years before. But there was a black market for them. It was actually through Zorinda that she had gotten hold of the book. It wasn't hers to keep but hers to rent. For a pfennig a day she could have it. But if Zorinda was gone?

The author, Mark Twain, was the funniest writer in the whole world. In this chapter, Huck and Jim, the escaped slave, resumed their raft trip down the Mississippi. Lilo began by rereading her favorite parts, where Huck thinks about how wonderful it is to float down the river:

It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened.

She skipped to another page and read:

We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem socramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.

Free and easy and work-shy? The question hovered in Lilo's mind as she looked out the window, see the fading light over the canal and wondered if she would ever see the great Mississippi River. Her father said that the Danube might fit in the Mississippi's back pocket. She had laughed. It was something Mark Twain might say. A sudden harsh knocking on the door shattered her silent musings.

The rapping turned to a pounding. "Who knocks like that!" her mother said, half rising from her lace making.

Her father made his way to the door, his magnifying glass still in his hand. Opening the door, he gave a courteous little bow as uniformed men flooded in, their batons raised ready to strike. Fernand Friwald, though a fairly large man, seemed to shrink before Lilo's eyes. She looked around frantically. Her gaze fell fleetingly on the yards of lace fit for a princess, her father's violin, which was most certainly not a Stradivarius, the *Zwetschkuchen*.

Their boots are so shiny. The air was striped with the dark polished gloss. There were only four men, but it seemed as if there were three times that many. Three of them weren't ordinary policemen at all but the dreaded SS, the *Schutzstaffel*, the paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party. One officer was barking something, but the words made no sense to Lilo: "In accordance with the decree issued on December 8, 1938, concerning the fight against the Gypsy plague . . ."

1938? It was 1940. And plague? What plague? Plagues were caused by rats and filth, Lilo thought. One could still smell the cedar scent from yesterday's floor waxing. The silver tea set gleamed. The windows sparkled. *We're Sinti. This is not supposed to happen. . . . My father is a member of the Imperial Clockmakers Guild. . . . You can't do this to him. To us. Papa . . .* Lilo wanted to scream the words that ricocheted through her head.

She wanted to say to these jackbooted SS men, "Look at this tart. It is from the finest restaurant in Vienna. They love us so much, they send home pastries every night Papa plays. Look at this lace — the lace of princesses, not dancing bears!"

The head jackboot, the one who seemed to be giving orders, was not from the SS. He wore the uniform of the local police. Lilo's eyes fastened on the tart. One of the SS men ambled over to the table and, sticking a fat finger into the center of the tart, scooped up a glob.

"Umm! *Zwetschkuchen* — ha, ha! *Zwetschkuchen* for the *Zigeuner*."

She was yanked from where she stood, then shoved through the door. They were allowed to take nothing. But the fat-fingered man followed them down the stairs with a fistful of tart in one hand and a nightstick in the other. Lilo inhaled sharply when she saw the blood oozing from her father's brow. Why had she not heard the whack of that stick? Yet she was oddly aware of the most infinitesimal small details — a scuff mark on the stairwell wall she had not seen before, a jewel bearing caught in the cuff of her father's shirt. Everything came to her with a startling, surreal clarity. It was as if she were meant to register every detail, even the smallest ones, as from that moment on, her life would change irrevocably and forever. Fat Finger was still laughing about his joke. "Ha, ha! *Zwetschkuchen* for the *Zigeuner*."

“**T**ogether — *miteinander*.” That had become their prayer, their chant, their hymn. “As long as we are together, everything will be all right.” Lilo’s father said this at least thirty times a day. And they were together, with about five hundred other Gypsies, Sinta and Roma alike, in a barbed-wire enclosure at the Rossauer Lände police station and jail in Vienna.

“A quarter mile, no more, from the Café Budapest,” her father also said even more often, perhaps fifty times a day. “If only I could get a message to Herr Gruniger.”

“A pastry chef is no use in this situation,” her mother had answered the first time her husband said this. But Lilo’s father wouldn’t give up. She noticed him now, studying a pigeon that had landed on the top of the barbed wire. She could almost read his mind. As a boy, her father had raised carrier pigeons. In their old apartment, the landlord had allowed her father to keep some on the roof. She had helped him tend to the pigeons, cleaning their cages. She had even learned how to attach the tiny tin canisters with the messages to their legs. Was he thinking of that now — of sending a message? She wondered. She felt a glimmer of excitement. Her father was resourceful, so full of ideas. He could fix things — watches, clocks — get them running again. She watched his face. He was thinking, thinking hard.

He sees that pigeon as a savior, a potential angel of deliverance. He must be wondering, Lilo thought, if there is any way he could capture it, train it, and make it fly to the Café Budapest. Could there be the slightest possibility? Her father turned away from the pigeon. Don’t! Don’t turn away! His face reddened with frustration, he kicked a small rock with his foot. That single gesture sent a shudder through her heart. Her father was such a patient, meticulous man. One had to be to do his kind of exacting work. It was as if at last he could no longer hold in the despair.

As it grew dark, floodlights came on.

“Oh, my God, look over there!” her mother said.

“Where?” Lilo asked.

“To the right, beyond the fence, up high.”

Lilo gasped. How had they missed it? It was a huge billboard, and on it, floating eerily in the night, was the luminous face of Leni Riefenstahl. It was an ad for *The Holy Mountain*, the movie they had talked about seeing.

“Good God, there she is!” Lilo’s father said, walking up to them.

The face was beautiful, almost unearthly, her mouth glossy and just partway open to reveal perfect teeth. Her eyes were dark and smoky and closely set, which gave her a somewhat beady look, almost feral. Yet there was a lovely delicacy to her face. Her high prominent cheekbones, the generous mouth, it all added up to a stunningly gorgeous movie star. There was something almost transcendent about that face, as if it belonged on Olympus with the gods. Her roles certainly reinforced this notion of a divinity. Her face loomed now in the night as bright as any moon. It was profoundly weird and discomfiting.

“I can’t look at her!” Bluma Friwald said. Her voice was shaking. Fernand put his arm around her shoulders. They turned and walked to a shadowy corner of the enclosure. Lilo followed them. But there was no escaping. Other prisoners had begun to point at the huge billboard. “Ah! Leni . . . Leni Riefenstahl . . . I saw her in that movie . . . *Holy Mountain*, and then the other . . .”

Every day, more Gypsies were brought in, and every day, the conditions at the police station

worsened. They all tried to stay as far away from the corner with the latrines as possible. The air was so foul, it was difficult to breathe. The rumors as to what might be in store for them multiplied.

The only thing they knew was that Rossauer Lände was a holding area for Gypsies facing deportation — a *Zigeunerlager*, a camp for Gypsies. For how long, they didn't know, and to where they might be deported was equally mysterious. There was talk of Lackenbach, an internment camp especially for Gypsies that was just nearing completion in eastern Austria. Another camp, Auschwitz, under construction in Poland, was also mentioned.

Lilo spotted Zorinda across the enclosure. She was talking with two other girls. As Lilo approached, Zorinda turned and gave her a big smile.

“Don't worry about the book,” she said with a laugh. “But pretty good, isn't it? How far did you get?”

“Chapter eighteen. Huck's left the Grangerfords and is just meeting up with Jim again. They're getting back on the raft, back on the river.”

Zorinda sighed. “We should be so lucky, eh?” She looked around. “Anyhow, let me introduce you. This is Michele, and this is Lola.” She turned to the two girls and gestured at Lilo. “And this is Lilia from my school.”

“Just call me Lilo.”

“So I was just saying that they're doing surgeries,” Lola said to her.

“Surgeries?” Lilo asked. “What hospital are you talking about?”

“Ravensbruck,” Michele answered. “Not a hospital.”

Lilo thought that she might have heard of Ravensbruck. It was a camp. An all-women's camp. It would have been terrible if she and her mother had been sent there without her father. But in the next minute, she found out why there was an even worse reason. Michele exchanged a long look with Zorinda.

“She might as well hear it,” Zorinda said.

“They . . . they do these operations on women so they can't ever have babies,” Michele said.

“And not just grown women,” Lola added. “They're doing it to small girls — girls as young as four or five.”

Lilo felt all the blood suddenly drain from her face. It was as if the future had been erased, any hope for a future obliterated. Being in this barbed-wire cage was nothing compared with the utter darkness of the black wall of sterility, of a childless world, of a family that simply ended forever and ever. The Friwalds would be extinct.

“No! It can't possibly be true.”

“It is true,” Zorinda said, and clutched Lilo's hand.

“Why? Why would they do such a thing?”

“Because they don't want people like us to have babies. We aren't good enough to bring a new generation into the world. They think we are worse than criminals. That is why they didn't put us in the cells. They didn't want us to contaminate the thieves, the murderers, the rapists who are inside the cells.”

“How do we know if we are going to be sent to Ravensbruck or Lackenbach — or Buchenwald, for that matter?” Lilo asked.

“We don't,” Lola said. “But we'll find out soon enough.”

That night, shortly after midnight, glaring searchlights suddenly swept the enclosure. A series of harsh, bleating noises came over the loudspeaker, and then the shrieking voice of the prison commandant.

“Achtung! Appell!”

It was time for roll call. Lilo and her parents had been at Rossauer Lände for only five days, but they'd been introduced to roll call, *Appell*, on the first day. The prisoners were all to line up in rows of ten. Each prisoner was required to be in the same position each day, ready to be counted. Then some were called out for various tasks — cleaning latrines, digging new latrines, washing the tin plates and cups they had been issued, or ladling out the inedible stews. But never had there been a roll call at the hour of the night.

Lilo stood between her parents. They grasped hands. Then they heard motors in the parking lot behind the enclosure. Dark-gray buses had pulled in. Emblazoned on the sides was the symbol of the Third Reich, now married to that of the Nazi Party: an eagle, its talons grasping an oak-leaf wreath encircling a swastika.

“Looks like we’re taking a trip,” someone whispered.

“Together — God let us be together,” her father murmured, and grasped Lilo’s hand so hard it brought tears to her eyes.

They filed out into the parking lot. The lot was not big enough for all of the buses. Lilo could see a dozen more lining the street. A long table was set up at the front of the lot. Police and SS officers stood behind it along with two men in civilian clothing and two women in nurses’ uniforms. Lilo tried to figure out how it was decided which people were loaded onto which bus. The nurses would point to certain women and girls, who would be taken from the lines and escorted to a nearby bus. *That must be the Ravensbruck bus*, Lilo thought. *Anything but Ravensbruck! Please, God!*

Did her parents know about Ravensbruck? Lilo wasn’t sure. She had not dared to tell them what the girls had told her. It was just too awful to imagine. She was afraid to look at her mother. Afraid that she might betray something that she knew and her mother did not. She wanted to protect her mother from the horrible thing that Zorinda and Lola and Michele had told her. There was a peculiar irony Lilo realized. For although she might never be a mother, she felt this inexorable urge to mother her own mother, to protect Bluma.

They were drawing closer to the table. The starched nurses’ caps seemed to take on a life of their own as the women bobbed their heads up and down, checking items off a list and then nodding for the next person to step up. Like strange white wingless birds, they nested in the darkness atop odd, disembodied heads, silently clucking. Should she shrink down between her parents or stand up tall? *No, stand up tall!* This was not a time to look invisible. They had to appear as a unit, inseparably forged like the strongest metals, like iron.

It happened very quickly. One of the wingless birds dipped toward them. “*Nächste. Komm mal her bis zum Schreibtisch*”— come up to the desk. Then another nod toward a bus as their names were checked off and the three of them were told to board bus number thirty. They were together! She felt her father ease his grip. Tears were streaming from all of their eyes. Just as they were boarding, she turned to look at the bus next to theirs, number twenty-nine. She gasped. Zorinda and Lola were both in a long line of women and girls. A nurse was hurrying them along. Zorinda caught sight of her. She shrugged, as if to say, “What a world we live in,” then turned and stepped onto the bus. But all Lilo could think of was the Mark Twain book still sitting by her book bag. *Some Mississippi!* Then she grabbed her mother’s hand and felt her father’s hand drop onto her shoulder.

We’re together! We’re together. Miteinander! The word clanged in her head. That was all that mattered. *Miteinander.*

As the bus rounded the corner, they came directly under the billboard of Leni Riefenstahl.

“Would you look at that!” her mother said softly. Lilo did not want to look up, but she could not resist. It was as if the eyes were reeling her in, following her. The beautiful face rose in the night. The piercing dark eyes, the serene brow, the elegantly molded cheekbones. A luminous presence in the night — an angel? A goddess? But it was only Hitler’s favorite movie star.

She heard the chimes of the clock tower in the nearby square.

“It’s off,” her father said, glancing at his watch, which he had somehow managed to keep. “Too fast.”

Lilo suddenly thought of the gingerbread man. She pictured him running through the streets.

The baker made a boy one day,

Who leaped from the oven, ready to play.

He and his wife were ready to eat

The gingerbread man who had run down the street.

Except it was a gingerbread girl. Two gingerbread girls, Zorinda and Lola. “Run, run as fast as you can!” she whispered. The window fogged with her breath.

BUCHENWALD & MAXGLAN

Mid-Autumn 1940



“So what’s this one?” The female overseer, the *Aufseherin*, scowled at the list on the clipboard. “Is she an O or a G? I’m not sure how to mark her.”

Another woman bustled up and took the clipboard. “Just match her name to the number on her uniform,” she barked.

“Ach! Here she is. That’s an O. I know someone makes the G’s sometimes look like O’s. Sloppy. I’ll talk to the intake secretary.”

“All right, extend your left arm and don’t wiggle. It’s ink. I want it perfect.” *Ink for what? Perfect for what?* Lilo wondered as the woman inscribed an O on her forearm. She had just been marked like an item on the discount counter at the department store in Vienna. She had become an article, a commodity — branded! But for what?

“Now that is a nicely formed O,” she said, still holding Lilo’s arm. “I learned how to make my letters in school. Always got an A+ in penmanship.” *And look where it got you!* Lilo thought. “What do you think?” the woman looked up brightly at Lilo as if expecting a compliment.

“I’ve seen better but not on human flesh,” she muttered.

There was a gasp behind her. The *Aufseherin*’s face turned to stone. Then a slow smile crawled across it, making her lips look like fat worms. “All right, then”— the words oozed out slowly —“Let me try again. Maybe I’ll put more letters on you just to practice my penmanship.”

“Aufseherin Liebgott,” the matron who was standing behind her said, “there are still thirty more prisoners to be done.”

The *Aufseherin* shrugged and waved Lilo on.

Lilo stared down at the O. Her rage surged.

As she rose from the chair and another girl was led in, Lilo looked at the matron who had gasped but the woman avoided her eyes. She was pretty, very pretty. Slender and blond, neither young nor old but there seemed to be a weariness about her that defied the obvious markers of age. No wrinkles, no gray hair. She shook her head slightly when Lilo passed by.

“Be careful,” she whispered. “*Es gibt keinen Gott hier.*” But Lilo did not need to be told that there was no God in Buchenwald.

On her way back to the barracks, Lilo saw guards and some other prisoners moving cots into the building. A man in shiny boots with a ferocious dog at his side was shouting orders through a bullhorn.

“Come on, move! We’ve got to get forty beds in there. Stack them up. It’s not a luxury hotel. We’ll dig latrines tomorrow.”

A woman next to her whispered, “We’re the first women prisoners here, they say.”

“Where are the men kept?” Lilo asked.

“Not sure,” the woman replied. “But here. They are here.” *Then Papa is here someplace,* Lilo thought.

“Did you see your father?” Bluma asked as soon as Lilo came back to the barracks. “No, Mama. The curtain closed between the men’s part and the women’s.”

“It was open when they did me.” Bluma sighed, her shoulders slumped down.

“Well, he’s here, Mama. Someplace in this camp. Maybe we can find him somehow.”

“Let me see the mark on your arm.”

“Why? It’s ugly.”

“I want to compare the letters. Maybe there’s a letter on his arm — a code. Perhaps they give families matching letters so they know who belongs together.”

“Mama, there are far more people in this camp than there are letters in the alphabet. All I know is that the numbers on our shirts match up with our names on the matron’s clipboard. But the letters on our arms make no sense to me.”

But Bluma was just staring at the O. She sighed. “There seems to be no rhyme nor reason.”

Lilo blinked. It seemed the most absurd remark ever. “Rhyme nor reason! Mama, are you crazy? They are herding us around like cattle. Branding us with letters. You think there is a logic buried in this somewhere? You think it’s our fault and if we had done something different, we could have saved ourselves?”

Bluma’s eyes began to well with tears. Her mouth trembled as she looked at her daughter in dismay. Suddenly Lilo wanted to take back every word she had uttered, even if what she had said was true. She had never in her life spoken to her mother that way.

“Oh, Mama, I am sorry.” She grabbed her mother and hugged her. Clung to her.

Her mother buried her head on Lilo’s shoulder, and said in a low, guttural voice, “All that matters to Lilo, is that we keep track of him. We have to find out his letter or maybe the number on his uniform somehow. We are just letters now, Lilo. Letters that seem to have nothing to do with our names. No names here,” she said softly, then added, “The ink erases us, but we can’t erase the ink. How . . . how peculiar.”

“I know, Mama. I know.”

“Think of something. Think of anything. We must send him a message somehow. Tell him we are all right for now. And find out” — Bluma’s voice faltered — “if he is, too.”

Lilo began to bite her thumbnail. The pretty matron who had warned her to be careful — what was it she had said? *Es gibt keinen Gott hier*. Could she go to her? Could she be trusted? But what choice did she have?

But the good matron seemed to have disappeared for the rest of the day. It wasn’t until that evening that Lilo caught sight of her as she walked by the barracks in Block 5 on her way to what passed for their evening meal, the same stew as at Rossauer Lände except perhaps slightly more edible, since it had been watered down to nothing. She waited in the shadows at the corner of the barracks and then stepped out.

“Oh!” Good Matron gasped.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.” A queer little smile fled across the woman’s face. *Frighten. I frighten her?* Lilo thought. *How utterly stupid. No wonder she’s smiling.* “I — I —” Lilo began to stammer. “I need to ask you something. A kind of favor.” She saw the woman’s shoulders sag when she said *favor*.

“Yes. Go on,” the matron said softly.

“My father. We need to know if he’s all right. I know there was a transport out of here last night. Was he on it? Is there any way you can find out? His name is Fernand Friwald. He’s a watchmaker and he repairs watches, too — old valuable antique watches. He could be useful. He could work in the munitions factory. There is one near here. He does delicate, fine work.”

The words began to pour from her mouth. The woman reached forward and placed her hand soft

on Lilo's arm. She shook her head. It was at that moment that Lilo noticed the blood on the woman's uniform. A single large stain and then a few smaller ones. Lilo could not drag her eyes from the bloodstains. "Did you hurt yourself?" The woman looked confused. Then she saw what Lilo was looking at.

"Oh, that — no." But her bottom lip began to tremble. "Look, a name doesn't really help. I never got into the men's section, anyhow. The best thing you can do is stand near the fence on the east side of Block 16. That's where the men are permitted some exercise. You might catch a glimpse of him there."

For two days, every chance they got, Lilo and her mother would go to the fence to scan the throngs of men milling about in a containment yard. On the third day, a boy called out. He was on the other side of the fence when Lilo had gone on her work break from assembling the tracks of barbed wire.

"So whatcha looking for?" He spoke German but with a Roma accent.

"What's it to you?" Lilo was immediately suspicious. No one had ever spoken to her, let alone made eye contact with her, when she stood at the fence. Almost immediately after arriving at Buchenwald, she had noticed that none of the prisoners made eye contact. It was as if they were each in their own private hell. No trespassing allowed.

"No big deal. Hey, only trying to help." He spoke the fast, slangy jargon of the street. He raised his hands in mock defense. But he kept his eyes on her. She noticed that his eyes actually weren't really black but the darkest blue. She had never seen eyes that color.

"I'm looking for my father. I just thought I might catch a glimpse of him."

"So maybe I can help you."

"How?"

"Look, I've been around."

"Around? Around this yard?"

"My third camp in four years. I know how these places work." He puffed out his narrow chest as if he were wearing badges, like a decorated general in an army, an army of concentration-camp prisoners. "You want extra food, I can organize it. You want —"

"I want my father," Lilo said, cutting him off.

"So what's his name?"

"Fernand Friwald. He's bald and maybe just under six feet tall. He has a bruise on his forehead from where the SS hit him when they picked him up. My mother and I are so worried that he was shipped out in that last transport."

"Okay, okay. I'll check into it. What's your name?"

"Lilian — Lilo. Call me Lilo. And yours?"

"Django. Meet me here later on your next work break. I might even be able to organize some bread for you."

"Bread?"

"Yes. Look, just be here, all right?"

"I will." He began to walk away. "Hey, Django," she called. There was a note of desperation in her voice. He turned around. "He's a watchmaker, and . . . and we were hoping that they might let him work in the munitions factory."

"That would be very smart of them to do that, but who says Nazis are smart? But I'll find out." Lilian cocked her head to one side and studied him. Where did he get this uncanny confidence? And if he didn't know something, would he ever admit it? She doubted that he would. He was shorter than she

was, thin as a rail, and looked as if he might blow away like a dry leaf in the slightest wind.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“How do you do what you do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Get bread, get information — all that.”

“Hey, did you see the sign on the iron gates?”

Lilo nodded and whispered the words, “*Jedem das Seine.*”

“Yeah. ‘To each his own,’ or ‘One gets what one deserves.’”

Lilo now realized that was what had irritated her when her mother tried to make sense out of the situation. It was as if she had been thinking they deserved this somehow.

“So what about your father? Did you find out anything?” Bluma asked when Lilo returned to the table in the barbed-wire assembly room, where they both twisted the barbs onto the lengths of wire. Lilo stared at her mother’s hands.

“You cut your finger, your thumb.”

“These pliers are lousy. I think they give them to us especially so we’ll cut ourselves.” Lilo kept staring at her mother’s hands. Was it possible that two weeks before, those same hands had been making lace? It was as if their entire previous life had been some sort of chimera, a complete fantasy.

“Did you find out anything?”

“Not really.”

Her mother looked up. “What do you mean ‘not really’?”

“Shush, here comes the matron. We can’t be caught talking.”

Once the matron was well past, Lilo continued. “I met a kid. He seems pretty smart. He says he’s going to look for him.” She heard her mother catch her breath. Then she reached over with her hand and stroked Lilo’s head.

“Thank God.”

“Nothing’s certain, Mama. Maybe he’ll find nothing. But I told him what Papa looked like.”

“And that he’s a watchmaker? Did you tell him that he could be useful in the munitions factory in the next town? A lot of them work there, I think. And I hear they get fed well, too.”

“Yes, Mama, I told him, and he says he’ll bring me some bread.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No. He said he could ‘organize’ it.”

“Who is this boy?”

“Django.”

“You mean like the musician Django Reinhardt?”

“Not old enough, but maybe he’s related or something. He’s Roma.”

“Roma, Schmoma — who cares, if he can find out about your father?”

Lilo looked at her mother and smiled. “Yes, Mama. Roma, Schmoma, what does it matter?”

Django shoved the piece of bread through the wire fence. But he did not meet her eyes. Lilo felt dread swim up in her. Was this bread supposed to soften what was to come next?

He began to speak, still without looking at her. "I found him."

"You did! How is he?"

"He's . . . he's okay." He lifted his eyes slowly. "He's leaving tonight on a transport."

"Where? What for?"

"I don't know. I couldn't find out much. I think it's going east."

"East?" East was bad. East was where there were rumors of new camps. Camps that were not simple camps of concentration but extermination. It was said that they would need laborers to complete the camps.

"But that's not right. He can't be going there. What do they need with a fine watchmaker? They need my father at Krupps, Siemens. I'm telling you, he can do the finest work. He understands gear escapement wheels. He could make those electrical switches. Siemens makes millions of those." Lilo babbled on as she threaded her fingers through the barbed wire.

"I know, I know," Django said softly. He wove his own fingers through and touched her knuckles.

"To each his own — the sign on the gate says it. This is Papa's own. He can do it."

Django just shook his head wearily. "Tonight at midnight, go around to the back of the barracks. You know where the rabbit hutches are?"

"Yes."

"They are using that drive to load up the transports. Be there at midnight. You might see him."

"All right." She opened her mouth to say something more.

"Don't thank me," he said.

A few minutes before midnight, Lilo and her mother made their way from their barracks as if they were going to the latrines. Behind the latrines, they cut toward the rabbit hutches. There were twenty or more of the small structures that perched on short stilts so the rabbit droppings could fall out to the ground and easily be swept up. She heard small grinding noises.

"What's that?" she whispered to her mother.

Her mother tapped her teeth. "They grind them."

But there were also other sounds — soft cooings and then the occasional thumps. *What do they talk about?* Lilo wondered. Would it be preferable to be a rabbit, numb to any danger, any threat? Yes, they wound up in Nazi stews, but they never knew anything different until the moment their throats were slashed. They had probably been raised in captivity, had no memory of scampering through a meadow, all blowy with the scents of spring. If there was no memory, there could be no fear.

"Look!" her mother said.

Lilo's thoughts about rabbits were quickly replaced by the scene at the fence. Half a dozen women were huddled against the barbed wire — not just huddled, but embracing it. Lilo and Bluma joined them. They saw two parked transport buses. Then there were the sharp cries of the *Lageralteste*, the senior prisoner, and his chief *Kapo*. "Line up — ranks of five." It was the same formation as for roll call. Then the *Kapo*, one of the inmates who aided the Nazi commanders in exchange for certain privileges, began calling out numbers. And the men answered. There were perhaps sixty men in all.

and when they were one-third of the way through the rolls, in the midst of the scores of prisoners answering "*Hier*," they both heard one that made their hearts leap. "Look right there!" cried Lilo. It was Fernand Friwald. Like a shadow, he stood at the near edge of one of the lines. But the shadow had turned toward where they stood and shouted, "*Hier!*" The shadow had spoken, exclaiming that he was here to his wife and daughter.

"It's him!" Bluma whispered hoarsely.

Then the ranks of men began boarding the two buses and the shadow that was Fernand Friwald was swallowed into the dark hulk. The engines started. The gleaming swastikas emblazoned on the sides flashed in the moonlight.

Many of the women began to cry, but not Bluma Friwald. Her face was carved into a grim expression. As she clutched Lilo's hand, they made their way back to the barracks through the mewling, thumping, softly gnashing rabbits in their hutches.

Lilo looked up. It was a starry night. She saw a recognizable autumn constellation. Orion. It had been in Piber, far from the city lights, where she had first seen this constellation. Her father had taught her how to recognize so many. The swan and the dolphin and the little horse, which seemed like a guardian constellation special for Piber. And now on this night there was Orion, the blind huntsman who stumbled across the night sky. But the stars smeared in the night as she began to weep. There was certainly no God in Buchenwald, and if there was one in heaven, she thought he was as blind as the huntsman.

The next morning, their work detail was changed. Both Lilo and her mother were to report to the garden to dig for the winter root vegetables. This was supposedly a good detail. One could sneeze carrots and potatoes and eat them raw. They had not been digging long when someone dropped on the ground on her knees between them.

Lilo turned, expecting another inmate, but it was Good Matron.

"Listen to me. Don't say a word." She turned to Bluma. "A selection for the procedure scheduled."

"Procedure?" Bluma asked. Lilo touched the *O* on her arm. Her mother had the same letter. There had been some discussion in the women's barracks about the meaning of the various letters that had been inked on their forearms. It was a code of some sort. It had been rumored that the letters might indicate a medical procedure. But no one could quite figure it out. Now Lilo knew immediately what Good Matron was talking about.

"What are you talking about?" Bluma asked.

The Good Matron now took Bluma's arm and tapped the *O*. Lilo was astounded by her own blindness, her sheer stupidity. How had they never figured this out? How had they believed that such medical experimentation was said only to be done at Ravensbruck?

"Sterilization."

"I'm too old anyhow to have babies," Bluma said.

"They don't think that way, and your daughter isn't."

"They wouldn't!" Bluma's face froze into a mask of horror as she stared at the *O* on Lilo's forearm.

"They will. Today at noon, there is a selection. You might escape, but your daughter won't."

"B-b-but only at Ravensbruck. Not here," Lilo protested.

"They do all sorts of medical experimentation here. Why do you think they finally brought women in?" Good Matron replied.

"It can't be!"

“It will be. Believe me. I can’t help you both, but I can help you.” She looked at Lilo. “This detail ends in another hour. Meet me at the pig barn. It’s right over there.”

An hour later, Lilo was buried beneath a mountain of pig feces, and now she realized that although there was no God, there was this woman whom she had named Good Matron. Lilo knew she could no longer look to heaven but it would be on earth in a heap of pig shit that she found a divine spark that what used to be called humanity.

From the smelly camouflage, she could hear the voice of the camp commandant, Karl-Otto Koch, in the square as he proceeded with the selection. She could picture him walking with his two leashed dogs and most likely his red-haired wife, Ilse, at his side. There were terrible rumors about the woman and the things she did to prisoners — rumors about skin taken from dead prisoners to make lamp shades. Lilo swore she could hear the click of the woman’s high heels walking across the pavement. The loudspeaker squeaked and hissed, temporarily drowning out the growls and barks of the dogs as the commandant began to speak.

“Listen to me, inmates. Today we shall be selecting two dozen of you to become medical pioneers. This will be your service to humanity, and those who volunteer quickly will be eligible for early release.”

Don’t believe them, Good Matron had warned. Those who resisted would be forced. Furthermore, Good Matron had warned that the dogs Commandant Koch walked with were specially trained to attack recalcitrant inmates.

Lilo was to stay buried until Good Matron came by whistling the melody of “The Watch on the Rhine,” a favorite patriotic tune of the Nazis. But it had to be that song and not what had become known as the “*Buchenwaldlied*,” the official camp song that was blasted through the loudspeakers every morning and evening. She could hear the commandant’s voice extolling the marvelous wonders of the Reich’s scientific endeavors. “You are to be a part of history!” He went on for what seemed like forever.

And then Lilo heard the voice of the commandant’s wife, Ilse Koch. High and shrill, it seared the air. “Ladies — if I might call you Gypsy scum *ladies* — you still, we assume, have breasts. You still have genitals. . . .” Lilo pressed her fingers in her ears. She would stuff pig shit in her ears to block out this woman’s voice. *But how will I hear the song? I must hear the song.* So she took away her hands and waited. The shrill voice called out names: “Brenna Wilfmore, Alana Kranz, Elsa Reinhardt, Bluma Friwald.” Every muscle in her seized. It was as if an electrical current had sizzled through her body. On and on it went. And then very clearly she heard the sound at last of Good Matron whistling the tune, and she came out from the pile of pig shit.

“What’s this?” Lilo asked as she peered into what looked like a bucket of bloody guts that Good Matron had brought.

“Pig guts. Slather it between your legs.”

“What?”

“Don’t ask questions. Just do it. And here’s a wet towel to wipe off the pig shit.” Lilo started to speak. “Don’t ask questions!” Good Matron hissed.

“It wasn’t a question,” Lilo said softly. “I . . . I just . . . I know you risked a lot. I don’t want anything to happen to you — that’s all.”

“Just — just go ahead and do what I said.” Good Matron’s voice was breaking. She turned away.

When Lilo had finished, Good Matron sighed. “It might work. Just pretend you are bleeding for the next couple of days. Use your mother’s cloths in your panties. She’ll have enough blood for the two of you.”

When Lilo returned to the barracks, the sight of her mother was so shocking that she felt her own legs start to give way. “Oh, Mama!” She could barely look. Her mother was crumpled up on the lice-ridden cot, too weak to speak. What seemed to Lilo like a puddle of blood pooled beneath her mother. Some of the blood had penetrated the cot and dripped onto the floor.

Two weeks later, Bluma was still bleeding when Good Matron came to them with news. “You’re being transferred. Stand up and look healthy.”

“Why? So they can have more fun killing us?” Bluma asked.

“You’re not going that far east. Not an extermination camp. Maxglan.”

“Where’s that?” Lilo asked.

“Austria, near Salzburg.”

Again the buses came at midnight, but this time it was both men and women being loaded. Lilo caught sight of the boy Django. He gave her a thumbs-up as he spotted her across the yard, then half a minute later fell into a line with Lilo and her mother.

“Never miss a chance to travel with the ladies,” he said, winking.

“What a card!” Bluma muttered.

“Mama, don’t be that way. This is the boy who told me about Papa.”

And now for the first time since Fernand had left, Bluma’s eyes filled with tears. She turned to Django and embraced him.

“Thank you! Thank you.” Her words were like gasps, and she seemed to be clinging to Django for dear life. Lilo watched her mother embrace him and felt an overwhelming sense of embarrassment. Of course her mother was grateful to him, but this seemed a bit excessive. There was the sharp blast of a whistle, the sign that they were to begin boarding the buses.

On the bus, Lilo and Django squashed into one seat so that her mother could have more room and almost lie down in the other seat.

He was a talker, this Django, and a joker as well. But he had an old man’s face, Lilo thought.

“So, Sinti girl, you’re not going to make a smelly bear joke, are you? You know, Romas and the dancing bears.”

“Why would I do that? Are you going to make music jokes?”

“I don’t know. Isn’t that what we are supposed to do? Sinti think they’re smarter than Roma, Roma think they’re better than Sinti.”

“Very childish, I think,” Lilo replied primly.

“No teasing, then?”

“Why would you want to tease?” Lilo asked, genuinely puzzled. But she began to notice that humor and grim sarcasm were Django’s strategies for surviving. Buchenwald was just another stop for him over the past four years. He knew the game. He had learned the ways. One did not simply get food. One organized it, for indeed it was a major endeavor — figuring out the right guard to approach, or willing to break the rules. One had to be a genius at reading human nature, be able to detect the subtlest glimmer in a guard’s eye that might suggest a trace of empathy, a hint of a moral conscience. And for this trip, Django had organized a hunk of cheese that he shared with Lilo and her mother.

“Maxglan,” he sighed. “Now, let me think, what do I know about Maxglan? This will be my fourth camp.”

“What was your first camp, Django?” Bluma asked.

“Ah, Marzahn, just outside Berlin — during the Olympics, would you believe it?” He said this with such delight, as if he had had a front-row seat to every event. “You know, Hitler had to clean up the

city, put a good face on things for all the visiting dignitaries and foreigners who came to see the games. So they rounded us all up to keep us out of sight.”

“Your family?” Bluma asked.

His face turned dark. He stared straight ahead. He was no longer a spectator in the front row of the games. “Yes. My baby sister died in Marzahn. Then my father and brother and I were sent to Lackenbach — the rats were plumper there. My mother was sent to Dachau and . . .” He shrugged, and his voice trailed off. “But Maxglan, let me think a moment.” He was quickly his old self again. “Local industry of Roma there. I’ve heard through the prison grapevine. So I might feel at home. Don’t worry: I’ll introduce you.” He paused as if to think. Then, scratching his head, he mused, “Local industry. Well, of course there are the Salzburg marionettes. And Mozart — oh, they love Mozart around there. Whole square dedicated to him.” Django talked on for some time. Lilo was just drifting off to sleep when she heard him say finally, “But I can’t imagine why they would be dragging us all the way to Maxglan.”

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