

The Hidden

Burgundy, France. Fall 1940.

When the Nazis broke through the door of her family home, Rose Harcourt crouched in the darkness beneath the floorboards and held her breath. She clamped her hands over her mouth, stifling her cries as the jackbooted soldiers pulled her father from his chair and smacked the rusted revolver from his hand. It hit the floor with a dull thump and skittered across the swollen, aged wood like a clumsy beetle. Her father hadn't even gotten off a shot.

“Stupid! Filthy Jew tried to kill us!”

“Ha! With that? We should have let him shoot, ja?”

“Would've seen him blow his own hand up!”

Three of them, plus there are at least two more outside. Oh Papa, please don't try to fight. They will kill you.

One of them crossed the room over creaky floorboards, making them spill years of accumulated dust down into Rose's crawlspace. Flecks drifted down into her eyes and she blinked as they grew irritated. Rose covered her nose and mouth to keep from sneezing.

A scrape from above told her the Nazi had picked up her father's old hatchet. Rose could hear it rattle as he tossed it from hand to hand.

“What is this? You fancy yourself a wood-cutter too? Would you like to make me a table?”

Rose imagined snatching it from their grasp and using it on them. Papa had taught her how to throw it at the fence posts outside since she was very little.

The Nazi went on. “No, you are nothing so useful. Just another French wine-maker, ja? Tell us, could we have some wine? Your finest vintage?”

Encouraged by their squad leader’s actions, the other Nazis joined in taunting her father. “You see the grapes out there? Withered little berries like rat droppings. He probably hasn’t produced a decent barrel in years.”

“Pah! Like you know anything about wine!”

One of them was rifling through their shelves. “He has nothing! No money! His food’s no better than our rations!”

Rose angled her head up. She could see her father trembling as they seated him in a chair at the table. Her brow creased with concern. *Thugs. He’s already bleeding. When did they hit him?*

One of them raised the butt of their rifle and struck her father in the temple. “Answer me!”

Rose flinched as though she’d been hit. Hot tears welled over her vision, but she could do nothing but let them fall in silence.

For pity’s sake, he’s helpless! You don’t have to do this!

The Nazis continued to laugh as they struck him. Again. And again. With each blow, more of her father’s face—bronzed from years tending their modest vineyard under the sun—became a bloodstained portrait of pain.

That was when the Hauptmann¹ entered. Even from her hiding place Rose could see him standing there like a monolith of cruelty. She got the idea from

1. Captain

the intentional way he removed his black riding gloves that the squad captain had more ideas in mind than simple punishment.

“Leave him some teeth, ja?” he told his soldiers, as though he were already bored by their antics. “We won’t get anything out of him if he cannot talk.”

Rose pressed her lips together without realizing it. Just hearing that they wanted information was more than enough to make her clam up. She couldn’t say the same about her Papa though. His jaw sagged onto his collarbone, spilling blood and drool onto his waffle-knit shirt.

The Hauptmann pulled up a chair in front of her Papa and took a seat. He bid one of his soldiers to pass him a bottle of wine from the counter. Rose watched him uncork it and sample the goods. He made an unsightly, exaggerated grimace and tossed the bottle back to his soldiers.

“Cheap wine,” he muttered. “What kind of Frenchman are you, to produce such piss?”

A tiny white stab of pride moved in Rose’s belly. Her father had worked his hands to the bone in their vineyard. They’d had no help, not since the war broke out and reduced the availability of supplies. Papa had trusted their relatively remote location to keep them safe. They had no valuables; nothing worth stealing. And no one knew they were Jewish. Papa and *Grand-Maman*—her maternal grandmother—had often argued at the dinner table over, among other things, the Nazi movement. Her Grandmother had insisted on staying ahead of the occupation, whereas Papa couldn’t abandon the home he’d shared

with Rose's *Maman*².

"She is dead, Pierre! She took up with you and bore Rose and she is gone! Do not stay here with her ghost! You have to let her go! Rose is almost seventeen! Ha-Sham³ willing, one day she will meet a man and start her own family! It won't be in this house. You have to move on from this place, otherwise you will cost Rose her life too!"

It had taken many years of listening to them argue for Rose to understand that Grand-Maman did not actually blame Rose for Maman's death.

"I blame him," she'd said one night, kissing Rose on the forehead as she tucked her in. "To stay here is suicide. They will come."

And then she was gone. Disappeared out into the forest. Papa had said she had a cottage deep in the woods, but he'd never told Rose exactly where it was, for fear that she would leave. What he didn't know is that Rose remembered visiting the cottage when she'd been a child and Grand-Maman herself had told Rose how to get there, in case she ever wanted to visit again on her own.

"Why can't I see her, Papa? It's been years!"

"These woods are dangerous, Rose. Your life is here now, with me. I could never live with myself if you left, too."

So she stayed, though part of her longed to venture out and see the bigger world. There were other cities in France: Vichy, Bourges, Dijon... Paris. She dreamed of visiting them. But Rose knew she had waited too long to act on any

2. mother

3. The Name (of God) - in Hebrew

of her dreams. Her season of opportunity had passed. Cold, cruel reality had swept across their country like a vicious frost; every city, town, and village in their path had succumbed. Now the danger was inside her home, beating the life out of her father. All Rose could do was watch her Papa wheeze bubbles of blood while the Hauptmann relaxed in her father's favourite chair. Her heart twisted in her chest. She wanted to reach out and touch her father's face. She wished there was something she could do to make them stop. *But what do you have to offer these monsters? What would they do to you?*

Rose was tamping down raw shivers of fear down when she noticed that the Hauptmann was leaning forward and speaking to her father. Rose risked pressing her ear up to gaps between the boards, but she couldn't hear what they were talking about. Her father was nodding, his bloody head rising and falling like a faltering heartbeat.

The Hauptmann was pleased with whatever he'd heard. "*Das ist gut*⁴," he said, rising out of the chair. He patted Papa's cheek. "*Keine schande dabei, Jude. Überhaupt keine*⁵."

Rose blinked in confusion; her father had taught her some German, but she'd never had the opportunity to converse with one. There was no shame in what? What had her Papa done?

"We heard from our source that it is you alone in this vineyard, ja? Though,

4. That is good

5. No shame in this, Jew. None at all

they could not be sure, they said they might have seen a *fraulein*⁶ around here a time or two. Might this young thing know something you do not? Perhaps we should ask her? Where is she?”

Rose held her breath. Who could have seen them outside together? Their small vineyard was quite isolated, and she rarely went to town with Papa. By the time she was of age to travel on her own, the war had broken out and Papa had forbidden it.

Papa’s head dropped down and he shook it. “My daughter used to live here, before I sent her to school in Vichy. She returned last summer to visit, but said this place was too small to contain her dreams. She... found the vineyard... boring...”

That made the Hauptmann laugh. “Boring! Ha! Well, let’s see if we can introduce some excitement!”

The Hauptmann barked instructions to his soldiers and they went about swiftly kicking down the door to the pantry and ransacking the place. After finding nothing, the soldiers returned and made their report, to which the Hauptmann sighed in annoyance. He wriggled his hands back into his gloves and returned to the door. Rose crept to the far corner of the crawlspace and heard what sounded like a transport truck waiting outside their open door. Before he boarded the truck, the Hauptmann stopped at the door and gestured to his soldiers. “*Wir sind jetzt fertig*⁷.”

6. girl

7. We are done now

[08]

One of the Nazis pulled out his pistol and shot her father. Papa sagged out of his chair and collapsed onto the floor above her. Rose bit into her hand to keep from screaming. Papa's blood seeped through the floorboards, spattering onto her pale, trembling cheeks.