**CHAPTER 17, PAGES 109-112**

My mother looked down at me; her eyes were an unfathomable pool of worry. “You’ll be safe, won’t you, Sarah?” my mother whispered, searching my face. “You’ll be careful? If you see anyone, look straight ahead. Don’t look away nervously. Don’t do anything to rouse their suspicion. If you come across any trouble on the street, turn and come home immediately.”

“Yes, Mama,” I promised.

My mother lifted a corner of my wool cloak to inspect the sleeve of my shirt. The band with the Star of David was wrapped firmly around my upper arm. My eyes followed her gaze. She swallowed and pulled the cloak more securely around me, fastening it below my chin. I knew I was to hide whatever food I was given beneath the cloak, but now my mother said urgently, “Once you are outside the ghetto, make sure no one sees the star, Sarah. Do you understand?”

I nodded, my thoughts running wild. Fryderyk had told me to take the path that led to his farm. Would I pass other homes on the way? Other farmers setting out for their day’s work? How would I know which farm was theirs? I hadn’t thought to ask. Now I felt my stomach clench nervously. What would happen if I got caught outside the ghetto?

My mother pulled me forward into her arms. I felt her breath against my ear. I felt the warmth of her body against my own. “I love you, Sarah,” she said.

I clung to her for a moment. She rarely spoke such words. Her love was always felt, always freely given, but rarely addressed. I closed my eyes and rested my head on her shoulder. I wanted desperately for that moment, when I was safe in her arms, to last forever. “I love you too, Mama,” I whispered.

I left the safety of the grass and followed the little cobblestone path up to the door of the cottage. The lantern that stood on the porch beside the door dispersed a small amount of light as I lifted my hand and gave three quick knocks in succession, like we had discussed.

A moment of silence passed in which I stood breathlessly on the doorstep. I could see on the eastern horizon a crimson glow outlining the mountains. I wanted to be safely back home by the time the sun was fully up. When no one answered, I hesitate, wondering if I should knock again or turn and run. What if this was another farmhouse with a lantern? What if a stranger opened the door and questioned what I was doing at this early hour?

What if I was found out?

Before I could move, though, I heard a latch turn and the door opened a fraction. The face of an older woman I didn’t recognize regarded me curiously, and I thought, *This is it. I’ve been discovered.* But then a voice said, “Babcia, this is Sarah.”

I looked up and saw Fryderyk standing in the shadows over the woman’s shoulder. He stepped forward and smiled at me as he put a hand on his grandmother’s shoulder. I let out a breath. My knees suddenly felt like they would give way beneath me. I hadn’t realized how tense I had been, every muscle taut, prepared to run. I fell heavily against the door frame. Both the woman and Fryderyk instantly looked concerned.

“Come in, child, com in,” the older woman said in a low, gravelly voice. She reached out a withered hand and took my own, pulling me inside. Once I stepped over the threshold, Fryderyk grasped my elbow, and together they led me to a chair . . .

“You poor dear,” the woman said, regarding me kindly as she leaned against a walking cane. “You’re shaking like a leaf.”

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“You are very brave to do this for your family,” Fryderyk’s grandmother said, shuffling around the small kitchen where we sat. I looked around at the modest surroundings that were still richer than our own. Aged, hand-embroidered drapes were pulled across the paned windows, filling the candlelit room with a certain sense of security. I let my body relax as I watched Fryderyk’s grandmother move from the stovetop to a small table, where she began to fill a satchel with bread and eggs. My mouth watered at the sight of the eggs . . .

“Here you are, dear,” Fryderyk’s grandmother said, returning to my side and placing the satchel at my feet. “Our hens gave us a good number of eggs, more than we need. And the bread is a bit stale but still good. We have our cow, so we have milk. And last spring I made a fresh batch of jams and preserves as well. I put some in for you.”

My mouth salivated at the thought of something as sweet as jam, as fresh as milk. I could feel tears of gratitude welling in the corners of my eyes. “Thank you,” I choked, swallowing hard. The old woman sighed and put a hand on my cheek. It was rough and calloused, but the touch was so kind that I started sobbing in earnest.

“Oh, my child,” she said. “It’s all right.”