

## A WOMAN'S STORY

### Chapter 1

I am a woman. These words slip out of my mouth as I face the officer who will decide my future, my eyes dried out, my heart broken wishing people would listen. My mind is going a thousand words a minute as I recite the prayer for guidance hoping that God is listening to me. Rough hands around my wrist. My arm is being pulled. My head snapped back to reality. The cries and shrieks of families being ripped apart float in the cold air. The crunch of my footsteps against the gravel is barely a whisper. I look up to meet his heavy, hard gaze. He looks away. His hand grips tighter around my wrist. I try to pull my hand back, it doesn't budge. I twist and jerk my hand trying to get free. Trying. My eyes are focussed on his hand and I don't see the other racing towards my face. Fire spreading from my cheek to my chin. Black. Blue. Purple. Red. It's all a blur. I can't see. Blobs all turning grey. My sense of direction was lost. A strong painful wind, like a line of pins, pierces against my face. My feet are no longer on the ground, his hand no longer on my wrist.

My eyes open and are no longer obscured. Dirt in my mouth, this is no way to treat another human. If they believed in God they would know, God forbids this. They should know. Turning, my hands and my feet digging into the dirt as I pushed myself up. Other people's shoes became legs that became bodies that became arms and heads. Other people's mouths open, mortified expressions on their faces. The officer stood before me once more but this time I was the one to look away first. I hung my head low in defeat, my eyes reached the floor, it was now clear to me who held the power, it was even clearer that it was not me. I was not something you show respect to, I was not human. I was an object, I was like dirt. Something for them to walk on. He grabbed my wrist once more and dragged me towards the big black gate.

It was as dark as a night sky with no clouds or stars. It was at least 3 metres tall. I wanted to cry, but I had to stay strong. Show these monsters that I am not afraid, even though in my head, heart, mind and soul I was terrified. But I had to trust that God would help me through this. I repeated the prayer again, careful to not say it out loud. It was the reason I was caught, and it will be the reason I am set free. I am sure of this. As I dragged my feet slowly forward, the sound of my feet amplified following the beat and rhythm of my steps, but each with a different heaviness and hardness on the ground. My curiosity got the better of me and I looked back to see a hundred, maybe more women, men and children following me. Each with their head hung low, eyes red and puffy from crying, some faces blue and purple from being thrown or hit by the many men in uniforms. A prickling sensation filled my cheek again and I almost tripped. Through the iron gates that will change my life forever, through those gates and into an iron box with a big iron door. This is it. I'm going to die. This is what believing in my God brought me death. I let a tear escape from my eye. As it rolled down my face, eating away at my armour, I looked up. Clothes in front of me, striped white and blue with the David's star sewn at the front as well as a 5 digit number. 76021. That was now my name. 76021.

I am in Auschwitz.

This is my story.

## Chapter 2

I am a woman, not a number that will slowly be forgotten, not an object that can be thrown around or put on display. I remind myself of that as they lead us to the barrack. Inside there were already people, each with the new striped clothes, their hair shaved, their wrists red, their eyes empty. There were 3 beds and no toilets. There were rats screeching around, children crying for their parents. Adults crying for their loved ones. A horrible stink of something burning filled the air, smoke coming from all directions, the black air sneaking in, into my lungs, into my head, into the blue sky until there was no more clear air left. You were trapped. Waiting to be taken by God and brought to a better place. A better place seemed like an impossible dream, I've only been here for an hour and I can not wait to go home to Krakow, but some of these people have been here for longer, days, weeks, months and maybe even years. They all wanted to go home. Their eyes were begging for it. I forced myself to move forward, one foot in front of the other. Right, left, right, left. I went slowly at first, my eyes making out the shapes in the dull and murky room.

Searching for an empty space, I found her. She had eyes that were broken, almost dead and a smile that was stiff, one of those that didn't match the feeling of the eyes, one of those that was polite but unwanted. Her hand dropped to the free space next to her as she motioned me to join her. "thank you" I whispered so quietly even I had to strain my own ears to hear it. I leaned forward to look inside the strange building. At least a thousand other people were inhabiting the barrack, 2 to 4 people on each bed, rows and rows of beds on each side of me. Then a gentle hand on my shoulder, pulling me back. I snapped back to see who it was, my heart beating faster, my pupils widening. It was the woman. I let her pull me back and saw a small boy 6, maybe 7 years old huddled close by her, sleeping. Not knowing the dangers of the world. Peaceful. The sight brought a smile to my face. It was the only light in this darkness. The darker the night, the brighter the light shines. This light shone extra brightly.

I didn't pay attention to the evil officer striding towards us. I didn't hear the buzzing of my surroundings. You could hear a pin drop. I didn't see his hand reach out for the young woman in the next bed before it was too late. Screams and cries of struggle and pain from the various women and children as well as the occasional sigh that escaped from between his thin lips. An elderly woman on her knees begging for what I thought was her granddaughter to be freed. I heard her praying out loud to God, demanding the young woman be free and safe. The officer heard her pray and threw the young girl onto the nearest bed. He stormed towards the elderly woman and stopped inches away from her face. All eyes were on them and tears flooded down her face. He stared into her eyes, piercing into her soul, ripping it away from her heart. He pulled his hand back. Everyone held their breath. Seconds felt like minutes until he swung his hand forward. He swung with such a force you could hear the whistle of the wind as it moved out of the way. The elderly woman's face turned to the side. A red hand print stained on her pale skin. The young woman could only watch. She fell onto her knees crying. I didn't know what I was doing as I stood up. I walked towards the man. Everyone held their breath again. Silence.

Then I chundered "take me instead". My voice steady, surprising myself and the others. Out of the corner of my eyes, I could see faces turning, questioning my truth and honesty. Quietly judging my decision, but I knew it was right, this is what God wants me to do. This is my purpose. The man looked me up and down and mumbled "you'll do," he grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me outside.

### Chapter 3

I am a woman. Not a toy, not a puppet. I am God's child and will do as He teaches. I was shuffled along, hastily moved by force, with not a care in the world. My feet kicked at the uneven ground, stumbling at the invisible holes. Long flakes of snake-like grass itched and bit at my legs as I went on. The new trousers being pulled this way and that, getting hooked on to slivers of grass, shivering in the wind. The trousers weren't very good, the wind still got through and started to drill at my skin. Piercing each cell individually, each time colder than the last. A sudden jolt from the officer brought back to reality as we reached a different barrack, this one with light radiating out the door. There were no shadows in sight. Is this my new home?

Inside were a group of officers and generals, each with a mischievous grin, each with deadly blue eyes that would drown them quicker than the rivers in the world. Their faces were stern, bony and young, their smiles hid knives and greed behind their backs, ready to use them both while trust had its back turned. The officer who brought me here told me to stand by the other women facing the wall. I did as I was told. The last thing I want is any more trouble. I walked over to the dusty wall and saw a dozen other women standing there. The one next to me was of a different colour, but I could still see tears rolling down her lifeless, defeated face. I decided to have a conversation with her, to try to encourage her not to lose hope. I found out her name is Margita and she is Roma Gypsy. She was brought here along with a few others from her barrack. Just before I could tell her my name I heard a whip crackle. Then I felt it against my back, like ice or alcohol on a burning, infected wound.

The officers were talking to each other. Then I heard a name. Herr Clauberg. Footsteps were coming towards us. I was at the end of the line so I knew whatever was going to happen I was going to be first. A rough scaly hand on my shoulder turned me around. A man with round, circular glasses was staring in my face, his calm expression turned into an agitated one. His lips turned in. His jaw clenched. His eyes are squinty. His clean forehead turned wrinkly. He shouted in my face "I wanted that other girl, and you bring me this! What sort of soldiers are you?" Then an officer replied, stammering "well, sh-sh-she um she volunteered" "What?!" Herr Clauberg defied the impossible, he got angrier. He looked me up and down and mumbled "well, I guess she will have to do. It's too late to bring another one." His face instantly calmed and with a big smile on his face he declared "Let's begin..."

-Emma Goncalves  
Year 9

NOTE: Herr Clauberg was a Nazi doctor who experimented with mass sterilization on several hundred women found in the camps. He used chemicals to sterilize these women and the experiments often resulted in death or severe inflammation.