

“Resistance”

By Khamil Williamson

Our Lady of the Elms

Word Count: 719

I was twelve the last time I held my father's hand.

It was early in the morning, 3.A.M, when they came, their steel boots on the cracked stone of the house's sidewalk, voices sharp and certain. My father bent down to me, pressed his head to mine, and gave me his pocketwatch. He whispered in his same, soft tone, "Hope is not loud, but strong." My father was then gone, like many other fathers during the Nazi occupation. I, fragile and broken, stood with my tears, not letting them fall.

I am fifteen now; even though three years have passed, I carry my father with me every day, the way people carry their belongings through the narrow streets of the ghetto. We were forced into a small broken apartment soon after. This is where I watch another piece of my mother break, as she had to choose who would share the single ragged bed next to the dripping faucet. The fear in the streets made everything feel so small. Food was rationed, schools weren't open, and families moved and disappeared like dirt in the wind. Although I was not attending school, I was still learning. I learned that resistance did not always mean weapons. Sometimes resistance means decisions that help people to live and survive. Historians often speak of resistance as armed risings like the Warsaw Ghetto rising of 1943, when Jewish fighters stood against German troops despite knowing they might lose. But there was another kind of resistance, something quieter.

My mother began to grow weaker as the months went by. Her eyes were constantly hungry and searching for something she could not find. Meanwhile my sisters were too young to know why our world had shrunk, and worse, why our father must leave us when he did. I was the one who did know and remember. I told them, every night, after our scraps called dinner, stories of our father and the ones he told me back home. I would only speak of freedom and dignity. About how Jewish life was rich with culture, learning, and family. The Nazis tried to take and erase all history of such. The memories alone became defiant to me. In secret, teachers held underground classes, risking death. Doctors treated patients, and orphans could rely on neighbors and never be abandoned. Resistance can be moral and intellectual, just as much as it can be physical. Standing firm in who you are is powerful, even when everything pushes you to disappear.

Hope was fragile, but real and exciting. I saw it in scraps of paper passed around the bus stop between families. In whispered prayers and those who documented the truth through all the brutality, like Emanuel Ringelblum, a historian in the Warsaw Ghetto. He helped hide thousands of documents to preserve evidence. He understood the importance of telling the story that mattered; even if bodies were destroyed, the truth must survive. In my own way, I became a Keeper of Truth for my family.

I wrote letters to my father even though I had no where to send them. My youngest sister still hummed the songs he taught when she was five. Meanwhile, my other sister learned to read using old books and papers. Writing my letters was my refuge and if the Nazis wanted to break families, then loving my father in silence was my rebellion. Anne Frank once wrote that “in spite

of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” She was my age when she hid, and hoped for good. Her words survived when she was gone and mine will too. Resistance took many forms during this period. Each act said the same thing: we are still human. The Nazis tried to turn people into numbers, but hope gave us a name again. I became more than a servant waiting on his master. I became guidance for my family, a symbol that even in darkness, someone must carry the light.

I do not know if my father lived. Many may have a loved one waiting for that happy reunion. But I do know that as long as I remember him, he is not gone.

Hope is resistance. Memory is resistance, and sometimes a quiet fifteen-year-old boy is enough to keep a family together.

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