

I saw no faces, heard only grunts, and felt ruthless, determined hands pushing and pulling at my limbs as if they were weeds to be ripped out of the ground. The hands bound my wrists and ankles with cords that burned into my skin. Someone flung me like a sack over his shoulder and carried me downwards into a dark place. The last thing those hands did was to tie a rag around my mouth so tightly it wrenched apart my lips and teeth and made my head ring. Then I heard feet pound back up a set of steps, a door slam, and the bolt of a lock click into place. How many feet were there? I couldn't tell. As suddenly as they'd crashed into my life, my captors vanished. Inky darkness blotted out my eyes. Silence stuffed my ears. I was alone, bound like an animal made ready for slaughter with a gag in my mouth. My tongue lapped helplessly against the stiff cloth.

The darkness exploded into a million wriggling dots that swept me into oblivion.

When I came to, I was exactly as before only now the rag was slimy wet with my own saliva and the dampness of the floor had seeped into my clothes. I was afraid to move. But I had to move. Rocking myself gently, pushing with my toes, I managed to roll over on my back. This was progress. Bracing my weight on my fists, my bottom, and my heels, I wriggled along like an inchworm. At last I arrived somewhere—at a wall. And this wall allowed me to push myself up into a sitting position and to rest my head. Though my eyes had adjusted to the dark, all I could discern in the gloom was the vague shape of a pillar. Otherwise nothing. For the first time since I arrived where they'd dumped me, I had a clear thought. I was in a cellar of some sort, perhaps underneath someone's house. If this is a cellar, there must be a door. There were steps that led down here, and the same steps lead back up. *Find them.*

Once again I inched my way along the rough floor, exploring the space with my body, feet going first as my head dangled behind. *Don't panic. Steady. Listen. Wasn't there a sound? Just the hammer of my heart. But no! Something more.*

I held my breath and strained to listen and it seemed I heard a murmur coming from the direction in which I'd been going. I wriggled forward, driven by the hunger to hear. Pausing to catch

my breath I heard it again: faint, so faint it could have been a dream. But the murmur was real and as I moved closer became the sound of faraway voices singing. The voices pulled me towards them, reeled me in. After what seemed a long time, my feet struck up against something hard. I lifted them and groped with the toes of my shoes. The hard thing had shape, an edge. It was a step. When I stopped gasping, I stilled and listened, all my being focused on sound. I knew this song. I knew it well. “*Lekhah Dodi*,” the traditional song to welcome the Sabbath and that pictured the spirit of the Sabbath as a bride.

*Come my beloved*

*let us meet the bride*

*let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath*

Only the ghost of the melody came to my ears, not the words, but the words weren’t necessary because they’d been stored in the deep vault of childhood memory.

*Observe and remember in a single word*

*He caused us to hear, the one and only Lord*

*To welcome the Sabbath, let us progress*

*For that is the source from which to bless*

Of all the hymns of the Jewish liturgy, this was the one—perhaps the only one—that had made a permanent dwelling in my heart. Tears pricked my eyes as I became a child again, leaning against the wooden rail of the women’s gallery at the Weisse Storch Synagogue, gazing down upon the rows of men in their prayer shawls.

*Arise now, shake off the dust*

*Don your robes of glory, my people, you must*

The cantor would stand on the dais, wearing the hat I'd always craved for myself for it was black velvet in the shape of a plush crown with a tasselled pompom, and it made the person who wore it look so very tall. Beneath the magnificent hat was a wizened monkey face with glasses, but when the cantor sang he became a winged angel. His tenor voice soared to the ceiling, to heaven itself, people liked to say. He stretched out the words, embellishing each with exotic vocalizations that became pure, throbbing gold.

*Rouse yourselves, rouse yourselves,*

*your light is comin . . .*

Through all my years in Jerusalem I'd never been tempted to attend a synagogue service though I had peeked into windows of some of the historic ones out of curiosity. They were musty, shabby places that left me cold. But on Friday evenings in summertime when Duncan and I strolled about, letting our feet take us into tumbledown older quarters of the Jewish town, we both liked to listen to the hymns that poured out of doorways. I would hum along with "*Lekhah Dodi*" and translate the verses at Duncan's prodding. He found the words quaint, while to me they carried the oppressive weight of religion, especially the call to "observe and remember the Sabbath." But the melody! It sprang free of commandments, floated on the caressing breezes of a Jerusalem evening, took me back to a happy corner of childhood I hadn't realized existed.

The faraway singing now came to an end. It was replaced by faint muttering, punctuated every so often by a thin yelp that I knew was a shouted "Amen." There had to be a synagogue nearby,

crammed with Jews reciting the Friday evening service. And if they were only welcoming the Sabbath now, then not much time had passed since my abduction from my spot in front of the billboard. An hour at the most. It hardly seemed possible, but must be so. The version of *Lekhah Dodi* they sang was Ashkenazi. Perhaps I was in an Orthodox quarter of the city where the men had side curls and wore black hats and long black coats. The synagogue had to be close by, perhaps just across a courtyard from the door that led to my cellar. In half an hour, the service over, the courtyard would fill with congregants, at least for a few minutes before they all dispersed home for their Sabbath evening meals. If only I could make my presence known!

I writhed around to reposition myself so that I was facing the direction in which I'd come, my back to the steps. I could touch the bottom step, explore its blunt edge with my fingertips. Pushing with my heels, heaving with my elbows, kicking and panting, I manoeuvred myself into a sitting position on the bottom step.

I struggled upwards, backwards. Another step. Another. Trembling, out of breath, I cranked my head around as far as I could, hoping to catch sight of a door. My famished eyes beheld a glimmer. A faint gleam of light had squeezed through a gap and sent thin, golden fingers into the gloom. And yes, I could see the shadowy outline of the door as well as the top of the steps that were still far above my head. It was a yellowish, artificial light. Beyond the door was a courtyard, I decided, with a lamp post whose lamp had turned on before the start of the Sabbath. If I could heave myself upwards some more, I'd soon be bathed in its miraculous glow. I was going to get myself up to the door, and when there, I would bang against it with the back of my head. Bang and bang and bang, so that the black-robed creatures who'd arrived in the courtyard from the synagogue after the service would hear me, break the lock, exclaim in wonder, and pity at my plight and gather me into their arms.