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Perhaps the best comparison for Edie's book is to another Shoah memoir, Viktor Frankl's brilliant classic *Man's Search for Meaning*. Dr. Eger shares Frankl's profundity and deep knowledge of humanity, and adds the warmth and intimacy of a lifelong clinician. Viktor Frankl presented the psychology of the prisoners who were with him in Auschwitz. Dr. Eger offers us the psychology of freedom.

In my own work I have long studied the psychological foundations of negative forms of social influence. I've sought to understand the mechanisms by which we conform and obey and stand by in situations where peace and justice can be served only if we choose another path if we act heroically. Edie has helped me to discover that heroism is not the province only of those who perform extraordinary deeds or take impulsive risks to protect themselves or others—though Edie has done both of these things. Heroism is rather a mind-set or an accumulation of our personal and social habits. It is a way of being. And it is a special way of viewing ourselves. To be a hero requires taking effective action at crucial junctures in our lives, to make an active attempt to address injustice or create positive change in the world. To be a hero requires great moral courage. And each of us has an inner hero waiting to be expressed. We are all "heroes in training." Our hero training is life, the daily circumstances that invite us to practice the habits of heroism: to commit daily deeds of kindness; to radiate compassion, starting with self-compassion; to bring out the best in others and ourselves; to sustain love, even in our most challenging relationships; to celebrate and exercise the power of our mental freedom. Edie is a hero—and doubly so, because she teaches each of us to grow and create meaningful and lasting change in ourselves, in our relationships, and in our world.

Two years ago Edie and I traveled together to Budapest, to the city where her sister was living when the Nazis began rounding up Hungarian Jews. We visited a Jewish synagogue, its courtyard a

I want to make one thing very clear. When I talk about victims and survivors, I am not blaming victims—so many of whom never had a chance. I could never blame those who were sent right to the gas chambers or who died in their cot, or even those who ran into the electric barbed wire fence. I grieve for all people everywhere who are sentenced to violence and destruction. I live to guide others to a position of empowerment in the face of all of life's hardships.

I also want to say that there is no hierarchy of suffering. There's nothing that makes my pain worse or better than yours, no graph on which we can plot the relative importance of one sorrow versus another. People say to me, "Things in my life are pretty hard right now, but I have no right to complain—it's not *Auschwitz*." This kind of comparison can lead us to minimize or diminish our own suffering. Being a survivor, being a "thriver" requires absolute acceptance of what was and what is. If we discount our pain, or punish ourselves for feeling lost or isolated or scared about the challenges in our lives, however insignificant these challenges may seem to someone else, then we're still choosing to be victims. We're not seeing our choices. We're judging ourselves. I don't want you to hear my story and say, "My own suffering is less significant." I want you to hear my story and say, "If she can do it, then so can I!"

One morning I saw two patients back to back, both mothers in their forties. The first woman had a daughter who was dying of hemophilia. She spent most of her visit crying, asking how God could take her child's life. I hurt so much for this woman—she was absolutely devoted to her daughter's care, and devastated by her impending loss. She was angry, she was grieving, and she wasn't at all sure that she could survive the hurt.

My next patient had just come from the country club, not the hospital. She, too, spent much of the hour crying. She was upset because her new Cadillac had just been delivered, and it was the

thing.

I have returned so that I can rest a little longer in this time when our arms are joined and we belong to one another. I see our sloped shoulders. The dust holding to the bottoms of our coats. My mother. My sister. Me.

* * *

Our childhood memories are often fragments, brief moments or encounters, which together form the scrapbook of our life. They are all we have left to understand the story we have come to tell ourselves about who we are.

Even before the moment of our separation, my most intimate memory of my mother, though I treasure it, is full of sorrow and loss. We're alone in the kitchen, where she is wrapping up the leftover strudel that she made with dough I watched her cut by hand and drape like heavy linen over the dining room table. "Read to me," she says, and I fetch the worn copy of *Gone with the Wind* from her bedside table. We have read it through once before. Now we have begun again. I pause over the mysterious inscription, written in English, on the title page of the translated book. It's in a man's handwriting, but not my father's. All that my mother will say is that the book was a gift from a man she met when she worked at the Foreign Ministry before she knew my father.

We sit in straight-backed chairs near the woodstove. I read this grown-up novel fluently despite the fact that I am only nine. "I'm glad you have brains because you have no looks," she has told me more than once, a compliment and a criticism intertwined. She can be hard on me. But I savor this time. When we read together, I don't have to share her with anyone else. I sink into the words and the story and the feeling of being alone in a world with her. Scarlett returns to Tara at the end of the war to learn her mother is dead and her father is far

move. Only later, long after the surgery has proved successful, can I see the scene from my mother's point of view, how she must have suffered at my suffering.

I am happiest when I am alone, when I can retreat into my inner world. One morning when I am thirteen, on the way to school, in a private gymnasium, I practice the steps to the "Blue Danube" routine my ballet class will perform at a festival on the river. Then invention takes hold, and I am off and away in a new dance of my own, one in which I imagine my parents meeting. I dance both of their parts. My father does a slapstick double take when he sees my mother walk into the room. My mother spins faster, leaps higher. I make my whole body arc into a joyful laugh. I have never seen my mother rejoice, never heard her laugh from the belly, but in my body I feel the untapped well of her happiness.

When I get to school, the tuition money my father gave me to cover an entire quarter of school is gone. Somehow, in the flurry of dancing, I have lost it. I check every pocket and crease of my clothing, but it is gone. All day the dread of telling my father burns like ice in my gut. At home he can't look at me as he raises his fists. This is the first time he has ever hit me, or any of us. He doesn't say a word to me when he is done. In bed that night I wish to die so that my father will suffer for what he did to me. And then I wish my father dead.

Do these memories give me an image of my strength? Or of my damage? Maybe every childhood is the terrain on which we try to pinpoint how much we matter and how much we don't, a map where we study the dimensions and the borders of our worth.

Maybe every life is a study of the things we don't have but wish we did, and the things we have but wish we didn't.

It took me many decades to discover that I could come at my life with a different question. Not: *Why did I live?* But: *What is mine to do with the life I've been given?*

make it to Budapest? You want me to live with that?"

I don't realize that they are terrified. I hear only the blame and disappointment that my parents routinely pass between them like the mindless shuttle on a loom. *Here's what you did. Here's what you didn't do. Here's what you did. Here's what you didn't do.* Later I'll learn that this isn't just their usual quarreling, that there's a history and a weight to the dispute they are having now. There are the tickets to America my father turned away. There is the Hungarian official who approached my mother with fake papers for the whole family, urging us to flee. Later we learn that they both had a chance to choose differently. Now they suffer with their regret, and they cover their regret in blame.

"Can we do the four questions?" I ask to disrupt my parents' gloom. That is my job in the family. To play peacemaker between my parents, between Magda and my mother. Whatever plans are being made outside our door I can't control. But inside our home, I have a role to fill. It is my job as the youngest child to ask the four questions. I don't even have to open my Haggadah. I know the text by heart. "Why is this night different from all other nights?" I begin.

At the end of the meal, my father circles the table, kissing each of us on the head. He's crying. *Why is this night different from all other nights?* Before dawn breaks, we'll know.

paces the bedroom and living room, picking up books, candlesticks, clothing, putting things down. "Get blankets," my mother calls to him. I think that if he had one petit four that is the thing he would take along, if only for the joy of handing it to me later, of seeing a swift second of delight on my face. Thank goodness my mother is more practical. When she was still a child, she became a mother to her younger siblings, and she staved their hunger through many seasons of grief. *As God is my witness*, I imagine her thinking now, as she packs, *I'm never going to be hungry again*. And yet I want her to drop the dishes, the survival tools, and come back to the bedroom to help me dress. Or at least I want her to call to me. To tell me what to wear. To tell me not to worry. To tell me all is well.

The soldiers stomp their boots, knock chairs over with their guns. Hurry. Hurry. I feel a sudden anger with my mother. She would save Klara before she would save me. She'd rather cull the pantry than hold my hand in the dark. I'll have to find my own sweetness, my own luck. Despite the chill of the dark April morning, I put on a thin blue silk dress, the one I wore when Eric kissed me. I trace the pleats with my fingers. I fasten the narrow blue suede belt. I will wear this dress so that his arms can once again encircle me. This dress will keep me desirable, protected, ready to reclaim love. If I shiver, it will be a badge of hope, a signal of my trust in something deeper, better. I picture Eric and his family also dressing and scrambling in the dark. I can feel him thinking of me. A current of energy shoots down from my ears to my toes. I close my eyes and cup my elbows with my hands, allowing the afterglow of that flash of love and hope to keep me warm.

But the ugly present intrudes on my private world. "Where are the bathrooms?" one of the soldiers shouts at Magda. My bossy, sarcastic, flirtatious sister cowers under his glare. I've never known her to be afraid. She's never spared an opportunity to get a rise out of someone, to make people laugh. Authority figures have never held any power

over her. In school she wouldn't stand up, as required, when a teacher entered the room. "Elefánt," her math teacher, a very short man, reprimanded her one day, calling her by our last name. My sister got up on tiptoes and peered at him. "Oh, are you there?" she said. "I didn't see you." But today the men hold guns. She gives no crude remark, no rebellious comeback. She points meekly down the hall toward the bathroom door. The soldier shoves her out of his way. He holds a gun. What other proof of his dominance does he need? This is when I start to see that it can always be so much worse. That every moment harbors a potential for violence. We never know when or how we will break. Doing what you're told might not save you.

"Out. Now. Time for you to take a little trip," the soldiers say. My mother closes the suitcase and my father lifts it. She fastens her gray coat and is the first to follow the commanding officer out into the street. I'm next, then Magda. Before we reach the wagon that sits ready for us at the curb, I turn to watch our father leave our home. He stands facing the door, suitcase in his hand, looking muddled, a midnight traveler patting down his pockets for his keys. A soldier yells a jagged insult and kicks our door back open with his heel.

"Go ahead," he says, "take a last look. Feast your eyes."

My father gazes at the dark space. For a moment he seems confused, as though he can't determine whether the soldier has been generous or unkind. Then the soldier kicks him in the knee and my father hobbles toward us, toward the wagon where the other families wait.

I'm caught between the urge to protect my parents and the sorrow that they can no longer protect me. *Eric*, I pray, *wherever we are going, help me find you Don't forget our future. Don't forget our love.* Magda doesn't say a word as we sit side by side on the bare board seats. In my catalog of regrets, this one shines bright: that I didn't reach for my sister's hand.

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Just as daylight breaks, the wagon pulls up alongside the Jakab brick factory at the edge of town, and we are herded inside. We are the lucky ones; early arrivers get quarters in the drying sheds. Most of the nearly twelve thousand Jews imprisoned here will sleep without a roof over their heads. All of us will sleep on the floor. We will cover ourselves with our coats and shiver through the spring chill. We will cover our ears when, for minor offenses, people are beaten with rubber truncheons at the center of the camp. There is no running water here. Buckets come, never enough of them, on horse-drawn carts. At first the rations, combined with the pancakes my mother makes from the scraps she brought from home, are enough to feed us, but after only a few days the hunger pains become a constant cramping throb. Magda sees her old gym teacher in the barracks next door, struggling to take care of a newborn baby in these starvation conditions. "What will I do when my milk is gone?" she moans to us. "My baby just cries and cries."

There are two sides to the camp, on either side of a street. Our side is occupied by the Jews from our section of town. We learn that all of Kassa's Jews are being held here at the brick factory. We find our neighbors, our shopkeepers, our teachers, our friends. But my grandparents, whose home was a thirty-minute walk from our apartment, are not on our side of the camp. Gates and guards separate us from the other side. We are not supposed to cross over. But I plead with a guard and he says I can go in search of my grandparents. I walk the wall-less barracks, quietly repeating their names. As I pace up and down the rows of huddled families, I say Eric's name too. I tell myself that it is only a matter of time and perseverance. I will find him, or he will find me.

I don't find my grandparents. I don't find Eric.

And then one afternoon when the water carts arrive and the

We hear clipped voices speaking German outside the barracks. The kapo pulls herself straight as the door rattles open. There on the threshold I recognize the uniformed officer from the selection line. I know it's him, the way he smiles with his lips parted, the gap between his front teeth. Dr. Mengele, we learn. He is a refined killer and a lover of the arts. He trawls among the barracks in the evenings, searching for talented inmates to entertain him. He walks in tonight with his entourage of assistants and casts his gaze like a net over the new arrivals with our baggy dresses and our hastily shorn hair. We stand still, backs to the wooden bunks that edge the room. He examines us. Magda ever so subtly grazes my hand with hers. Dr. Mengele barks out a question, and before I know what is happening, the girls standing nearest me, who know I trained as a ballerina and gymnast back in Kassa, push me forward, closer to the Angel of Death.

He studies me. I don't know where to put my eyes. I stare straight ahead at the open door. The orchestra is assembled just outside. They are silent, awaiting orders. I feel like Eurydice in the underworld, waiting for Orpheus to strike a chord on his lyre that can melt the heart of Hades and set me free. Or I am Salome, made to dance for her stepfather, Herod, lifting veil after veil to expose her flesh. Does the dance give her power, or does the dance strip it away?

"Little dancer," Dr. Mengele says, "dance for me." He directs the musicians to begin playing. The familiar opening strain of "The Blue Danube" waltz filters into the dark, close room. Mengele's eyes bulge at me. I'm lucky. I know a routine to "The Blue Danube" that I can dance in my sleep. But my limbs are heavy, as in a nightmare when there's danger and you can't run away. "Dance!" he commands again, and I feel my body start to move.

First the high kick. Then the pirouette and turn. The splits. And up. As I step and bend and twirl, I can hear Mengele talking to his assistant. He never takes his eyes off me, but he attends to his duties as

done. He is more a prisoner than I am. As I close my routine with a final, graceful split, I pray, but it isn't myself I pray for. I pray for him. I pray, for his sake, that he won't have the need to kill me.

He must be impressed by my performance, because he tosses me a loaf of bread—a gesture, as it turns out, that will later save my life. As evening turns to night, I share the bread with Magda and our bunkmates. I am grateful to have bread. I am grateful to be alive.

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In my first weeks at Auschwitz I learn the rules of survival. If you can steal a piece of bread from the guards, you are a hero, but if you steal from an inmate, you are disgraced, you die; competition and domination get you nowhere, cooperation is the name of the game; to survive is to transcend your own needs and commit yourself to someone or something outside yourself. For me, that someone is Magda, that something is the hope that I will see Eric again tomorrow, when I am free. To survive, we conjure an inner world, a haven, even when our eyes are open. I remember a fellow inmate who managed to save a picture of herself from before internment, a picture in which she had long hair. She was able to remind herself who she was, that that person still existed. This awareness became a refuge that preserved her will to live.

I remember that some months later, in winter, we were issued old coats. They just tossed us the coats, willy-nilly, with no attention to size. It was up to us to find the one with the best fit and fight for it. Magda was lucky. They threw her a thick warm coat, long and heavy, with buttons all the way up to the neck. It was so warm, so coveted. But she traded it instantly. The coat she chose in its place was a flimsy little thing, barely to the knees, showing off plenty of chest. For Magda, wearing something sexy was a better survival tool than staying warm. Feeling attractive gave her something inside, a sense of dignity,

Within an hour, the ammunition has been reloaded into new train cars and we're on top again in our striped uniforms, the blood dried on Magda's chin.

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We are prisoners and refugees. We have long since lost track of the date, of time. Magda is my guiding star. As long as she is near, I have everything I need. We are pulled from the ammunition trains one morning, and we march many days in a row. The snow begins to melt, giving way to dead grass. Maybe we march for weeks. Bombs fall, sometimes close by. We can see cities burning. We stop in small towns throughout Germany, moving south sometimes, moving east, forced to work in factories along the way.

Counting inmates is the SS preoccupation. I don't count how many of us remain. Maybe I don't count because I know that each day the number is smaller. It's not a death camp. But there are dozens of ways to die. The roadside ditches run red with blood from those shot in the back or the chest—those who tried to run, those who couldn't keep up. Some girls' legs freeze, completely freeze, and they keel over like felled trees. Exhaustion. Exposure. Fever. Hunger. If the guards don't pull a trigger, the body does.

For days we have gone without food. We come to the crest of a hill and see a farm, outbuildings, a pen for livestock.

"One minute," Magda says. She runs toward the farm, weaving between trees, hoping not to be spotted by the SS who have stopped to smoke.

I watch Magda zigzag toward the garden fence. It's too early for spring vegetables, but I would eat cow feed, I would eat dried-up stalk. If a rat scurries into the room where we sleep, girls pounce on it. I try not to call attention to Magda with my gaze. I look away, and when I glance back I can't see her. A gun fires. And again. Someone has