



Iby's Story, Chapter Three

They took me and I don't think there is an English equivalent to the place they took me, it is a place where they collected vagrants and prostitutes and undesirables until they decided what to do with them. From there I was sent to a detention centre in Budapest and from there to a refugee camp in northern Hungary in Ricsa where if we were good we were allowed to work on the land, which actually was rather nice because by this time all the Hungarian men who were able-bodied had been called up and were in the forces so there wasn't enough manpower to get the harvest in or work on the fields, so they were very pleased of getting any manpower and we got home baked bread and cheese and milk which was much better than the polenta that we were being fed on and I've never been able to look at afterwards and also one of the other things was those of us who were Jewish could with the guards go to church on the Sunday which was a nice walk to the village church.

In just about Christmas 1943 my parents and my grandmother and my cousin also escaped from Czechoslovakia, actually because my grandmother was so old obviously she couldn't crawl across no-man's-land they were actually brought in a boat along the side of the river, down the river, rowed down by the same chap who had brought, took me down. Well my father had been a Hungarian citizen and an officer in the Hungarian army and thought that somehow or other, although he had relinquished Hungarian citizenship that he probably would not be interned, but I mean that was a hope too far, both he and my mother were interned. My grandmother because of her age was allowed to go and stay with her cousin, my brother and my cousin who was the same age, were then about thirteen, fourteen, were allowed to stay with my aunt, who by this time they were not illegal immigrants, accepted them and I was allowed to come down to Budapest to visit my parents, to meet them. While I was down in Budapest I met Gaspar and we took a liking to each other and decided that as the Hungarian law stood, if he married me I would not need to go back, would be released from the internment camp and also by the same virtue my parents would be allowed to come out, as being my next of kin. So we arranged that we would get married on the 10th of June 1944 and I went back to the camp and an application was put in to get me released out on parole until I got married. Well I got released on parole in March 1944 but not

to Budapest as I had hoped but to a little place called Szekesfehervar in southern Hungary where there were some distant relations of my father and one of them had a little girl and I was going to be nanny for the little girl.

The next thing that happened was that the Germans occupied Hungary and the situation changed markedly. I was on parole so I had to report to the police every week that I was there and the situation was getting quite difficult there because the first thing that the Germans did, they took all the cattle, all the poultry and everything and exported it to Germany. They took all the foodstuffs out from Hungary, all the grain, everything, with the result that you are in the end reduced to the only meat that you could get was horse flesh but Hungarians don't mind that, I quite like horse flesh, and food was getting quite a problem there, which for Hungary, which was an agricultural country, was quite a new experience.

On the 4th of June 1944 there was an air raid and I went, I was staying with friends who I had been visiting in the evening, and because there was an air raid I couldn't get back to where I was staying, so I bedded down on the sofa in the sitting room and the next thing we knew which was about 5 o'clock in the morning we were knocked up, because the police came to round them up because they were Jewish and I said, 'Well look, hang on'. They had to wear, by the way, I was classed as a political prisoner being an illegal immigrant, which took priority over whether or not you were Jewish. So whereas they had to wear a yellow star, I didn't. I wasn't classed as Jewish because I was a political prisoner, so I was trying to explain this and they said, 'Well, sorry, you are in the wrong place at the wrong time. There is nothing we can do about it', and they took my papers off me but that was the only thing that they took everything of value that you had with me. People were told to take clothes and food with them but naturally I just had what I stood up in because I hadn't been, I hadn't anticipated being there. So on the morning of D-Day we were arrested and taken to a brickyard and they took all your papers away from you, so there was no way you could prove who you were because your identity had been taken away and this was the days before radio and television so nobody knew what had happened and I, this was just the week before I was due to get married. There was no way of my being able to contact Gaspar. I don't know whether Gaspar tried to find, to contact me because there was no way of communicating. So we were taken to this brickyard and the people sort of settled down in family groups and obviously they only had the food that they had brought with them and I felt acutely that it wasn't fair imposing myself on just friends because of my being there accidentally, so I wandered over to the

part of the brickyard where they had set up a makeshift hospital because they had emptied the hospitals of all the Jewish patients, so you had women there who had just given birth, people who had just been operated on, you had mentally sick, you had all sorts of people and there were a few doctors and a few nurses but not many because most of them had gone and joined their own families. So we were there for three days and then the evening we were with the chief, the doctor, the eldest doctor called us together and said we were being moved the following day and he said, he knew that we were going to go, be taken to Auschwitz which was the first I had heard of Auschwitz, I didn't even know of its existence. I don't think many people did and he had raided the hospital pharmacy and any medication that he could before he came there and he gave each of us a cyanide pill and said if things get too bad, this is the way you can find a way out. Well there was an elderly married couple, both doctors, who decided that as far as they were concerned this was it, they took the cyanide tablets and we found them in the morning, dead and we, as people were being loaded into the cattle wagons, we put them on stretchers outside the hospital so that everybody as they went into the cattle wagon could say their goodbyes to them.

We were the last ones to be put into a wagon, about fifty patients on straw, with a bucket in one corner with water and a bucket in the other for human waste and we started off our journey to Auschwitz in the wagon.