

Escape in Time



Ms. Lowenstein-Malz's novel, *נס של אהבה* (A miracle of love),
was awarded the Yad Vashem Prize for Children's
Holocaust Literature in 2008.



Escape in Time

Miri's riveting tale
of her family's survival
during World War II



A Novel by
Ronit Lowenstein-Malz

Translated from the Hebrew
by Leora Frankel

Illustrated by Laurie McGaw

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Escape in Time: Miri's riveting tale of her family's survival during World War II
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Summary: Based upon actual memoirs, this is the story of the Eneman family—of their remarkable ingenuity, astonishing luck, boundless courage, and unending love—during World War II, as they escaped the Munkács ghetto and fled to Budapest to hide in plain sight of the Nazis and the Arrow Cross.

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Laurie McGaw's paintings of the Latorica River and the gate of the Munkács ghetto can be viewed in their original forms as photographs here:

Latorica River: Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem (www.yadvashem.org)

The Gate of the Munkács Ghetto: Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Photo Archive, Western Galilee (www.gfh.org.il)

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NOTES

Page 42: The "When Thou Art Come" Torah portion (Deuteronomy 26:1 – 29:8) is the 50th weekly portion in the annual cycle of Torah readings. In Hebrew, it is called Ki Tavo.

Page 50: Yankel's brother's message, in referring to the tenth day of the seventh month and the ninth day of the fifth month, is based on the Hebrew calendar, where Nissan is the first month of the year.

Page 77: "She weepeth bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies." —Lamentations, Chapter 1, Verse 2 (1:2)

*This book is dedicated with love
and admiration for my beloved family,
the heroes of this story.
— Ronit Lowenstein-Malz*

Dear Reader,

Here is a pronunciation guide for some words that you will come across in this novel.

Csap (city)

CHOP

Debrecen (city)

DEH•bri•tzin

Eszterházy (surname)

EST•er•ha•zie

Gerbeaud (café)

DJAIR•bow

Kárcsi (first name)

KOR•chie

Kati (first name)

COT•ie

Ki Tavo (Torah portion)

KEY tah•VOH

Kulcsár (surname)

KOUHL•charr

Latorica (river)

LAH•tohr•ie•kah

Munkács (town)

MUHN•kahtch

Sholom aleichem (greeting)

SHAW•luhm ah•LEY•khem

Tallisim (prayer shawls)

tah•luh•SIM

Tarczi (surname)

TAHR•zie

Zsuzsi (first name)

ZHU•zhie

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1

Impossible



My grandma was in the Holocaust?

That's impossible.

But Rachel, my best friend, was absolutely sure. She told me that she'd overheard the principal suggesting to one of our teachers that she invite Miri Malz to speak next month at the Holocaust Remembrance Day program. I couldn't believe it.

Clearly, it was all a big mistake. It's *Rachel's* grandparents who should be coming to our school. Everyone knows that they were there. But my grandma wasn't.

Rachel insisted I was behaving like a baby, and maybe it was time for me to grow up.

"Well, you just don't understand," I told her. "She doesn't have a number tattooed on her arm. And besides, my grandma is always so happy and—"

"Albums!" Rachel interrupted. "They're the best, Nessi. People who were in the Holocaust don't have pictures of their childhood. Ask your grandma, and when she tells you she doesn't have any, you'll see that I'm right!"

But Grandma Miri *had* photo albums. Lots of them. And when I told Rachel that, I felt as if I'd won.

"Did you happen to see pictures of her from when she was a girl?" Rachel asked. She wasn't giving up.

"I don't remember exactly. Maybe," I said.

"I'm telling you, look for pictures of her from when she was a little girl."

I knew Rachel wouldn't let this go, so the next time I was at my grandma's apartment, I asked to see her photos. My sudden interest in her past was greeted with a lot of enthusiasm: "Here's one of my sisters and me when I got married. And here's your great-aunt Kati's first-born son, Eli. And, ah, here's your mom when she was just three years old . . ."

"Grandma," I said, cutting her off as gently as I could, "I love these photos, but where are the ones of you when *you* were little?"

She gave me a big hug and said, "I'll be right back." When she returned from her bedroom, she placed a thick leather album on her lap and opened it to the first page. "These are my most precious photos, Nessi. I keep them in a special box tucked under my bed. Silly, right? But that way, I always have my whole family close to me when I go to sleep at night."

"I don't think it's silly. Show me, Grandma. Please," I said, breathing a sigh of relief when I saw the baby pictures. "I want to see them all!"

Now I could present Rachel with my findings, and when I saw her the next day at school, I said, "My grandma has an album *full* of pictures from when she was young. Case closed."

"I see," Rachel said, thinking quietly. Then she declared with a definite sparkle in her eyes, "Well, obviously, our investigation is getting much more complicated, that's all."

Rachel insisted it simply couldn't be that my grandma was mistakenly asked to come to our school's special program next month.

"Maybe I should ask my mom straight out?" I suggested. But Rachel was quick to dismiss that idea.

*Grandma Miri pictures herself
as a young girl in Hungary*



"If your family's decided not to speak about the Holocaust, then your mom will just find an excuse," she said. "That's what happens in homes where nobody talks about it. You can bet your life, she won't discuss it unless you have irrefutable proof, which means you need to keep investigating."

"Maybe I should look for the yellow Star of David badge in my grandma's apartment? Maybe she kept it?"

Rachel stared at me in disbelief, as if to say, "Are you kidding me?" Then she told me that most people didn't keep their yellow badges—they ripped them from their clothes at liberation and threw them out. "Believe me," she said, "they never wanted to see those wretched things again."

"We've got to think of something else then," I said.

Before I could come up with a new idea, Rachel said hesitantly, "But you are on to something, Nessi. Not a yellow-star badge. But there could be some old documents or letters or notes. Maybe we can find something in one of your grandma's closets. We need to do a search. If you want, I'll come with you and we can look together. Something must be lying around."

We didn't concern ourselves with how we'd go about our search without Grandma noticing us, or what we'd do if the note that we found (of course there'd be a note) was written in a language we didn't understand—or how we'd even be sure that the note was connected to the Holocaust. We knew only one thing: the idea was brilliant and we totally had to go ahead with it—right away.

2

Flowerpots



“Grandma, can I go up to your apartment to water the plants?”

My grandmother was sitting in a café on King David Street, a few blocks away from her apartment, with her new friend, Malka Marom.

Every Monday afternoon, they meet for coffee. Grandma smiled with satisfaction in her friend’s direction, as if to say, “My granddaughter’s really something!” She replied that of course I could go up.

“This is my granddaughter Nessya,” she told her. “You remember, the one with the special name, from the Hebrew word for ‘miracle.’” Grandma stroked my cheek affectionately. “Such a sweet girl,” she whispered in Mrs. Marom’s ear. I blushed. Naturally, this was terribly embarrassing, and I desperately wanted to get out of there.

Grandma realized I was impatient. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. We’ll be ready to go in a couple of hours, and then you’ll be able to come home with me. Sit and have some tea.”

“But it’s urgent.” Rachel, who was now standing by my side—having dashed to the counter for a hot chocolate—interrupted the conversation. “You see, at school we got this assignment to help someone. It’s kind of like homework, and we absolutely have to do it today.” Rachel was getting all tangled

in the explanations she was making up, reducing my sudden helpfulness to just another community service activity.

You could see the disappointment in Grandma's face.

"You don't have to come with us," Rachel persisted. "If you give us the keys to the apartment, we can go alone, and once we're done, we'll return the keys to you."

Grandma gave me a quizzical look, but when Rachel and I put on our sweetest smiles, she produced the keys from her bag. "Just don't lose them, okay?" she said, handing them to me. We rushed away quickly. But as we left, I thought I heard her tell her friend, "If this is homework, I'm a flowerpot." Or maybe I just imagined it.

We raced to the apartment. We needed to conduct our search fast. I made Rachel swear not to make a mess, so that Grandma wouldn't notice anything. I searched in the drawers of the large credenza, and Rachel looked in the closet with the clothes.

"A lot of times, people hide important things like this among their socks," she said knowingly. I checked the drawers in the den and also the nightstand by the bed. I even looked underneath, but all I saw was the box with the album. We didn't find a thing—at least not something that we could believe was old enough or important enough.

We were about to acknowledge defeat and leave when Rachel asked, "What about this?" She pointed to a small trunk in the corner of my grandparents' bedroom. It was covered with a small embroidered cloth, and on the top sat a vase with plastic flowers that looked strangely real.

"Can this pretty cover be a clue?" I asked. I went over to see if its embroidery revealed something unusual. That's when Rachel told me that sometimes my brain seemed to be on vacation.

"Not the cloth—the trunk!" she said.

We quickly opened it. In the corner was a jewelry box. Excitedly, we lifted the lid and saw . . . jewelry. I gave Rachel a “gee, what a surprise” look, but she was busy opening another small box. Inside was an auburn curl.

“Maybe this belonged to someone she really loved who died in the Holocaust,” Rachel whispered breathlessly, “and this is all she has left of him.”

I laughed out loud. I knew it was my curl, from when I was a little girl.

When I told Rachel that, we kept lifting things out of the trunk: a packet of letters tied with a ribbon, an old key, a few scattered pictures from my parents’ wedding and my aunt’s, a box of matches—all sorts of things. The doorbell made us jump.

“Is your grandma back already?” Rachel asked with alarm.

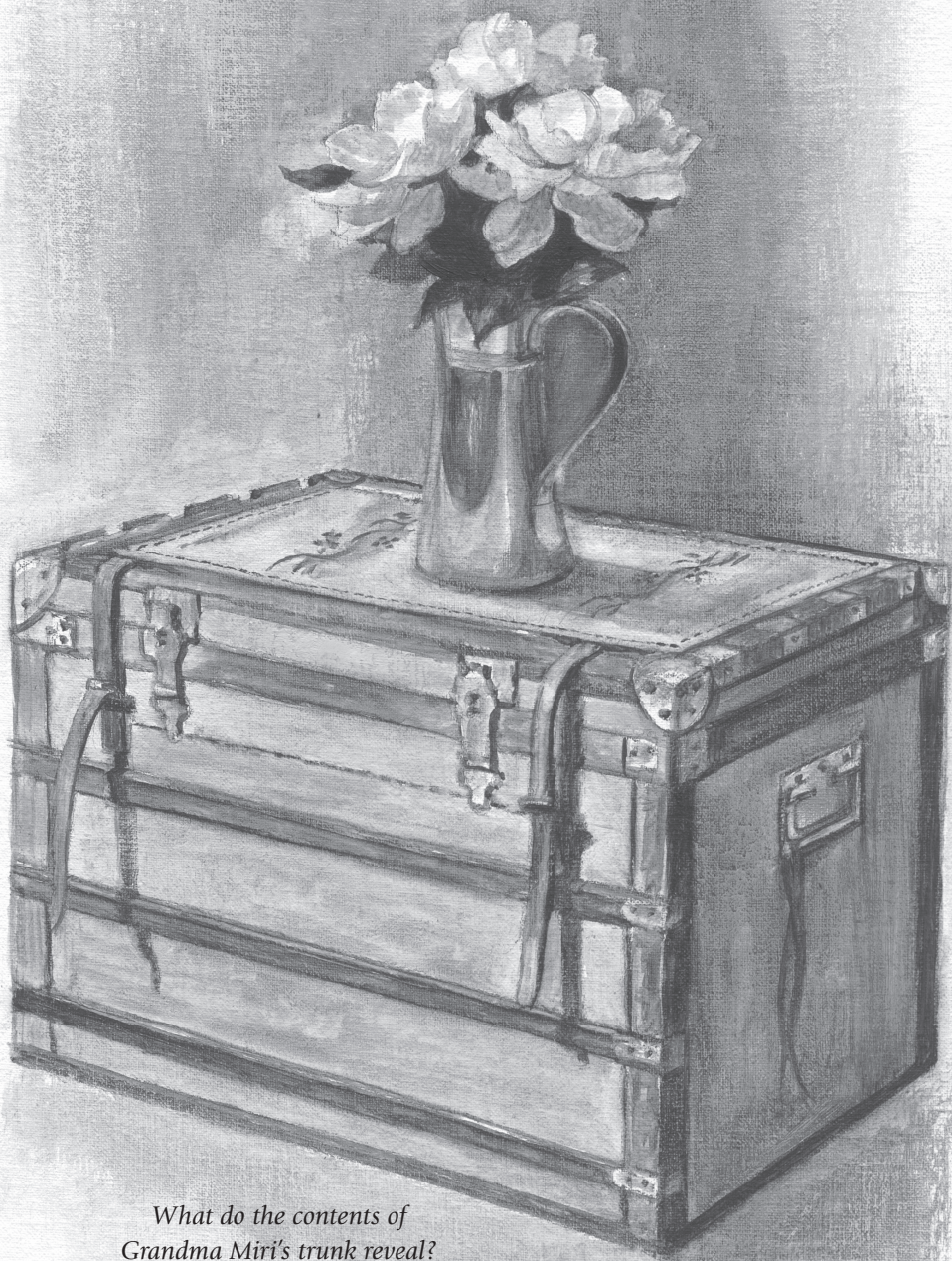
How? There was no way we’d been in the apartment for such a long time. She wasn’t supposed to be back for a couple of hours. We quickly shoved all the items back into the trunk, covered it again with the embroidered cloth, and ran to the door. At the last moment, Rachel realized that we’d forgotten about the vase, so she ran to put it back where it belonged.

“How long does it take to water the plants?” Grandma Miri asked with a smile as I opened the door. “And where’s your friend? Did she leave you to volunteer all by yourself?”

Before I could answer, we heard the sound of flushing water in the bathroom. Rachel is such a genius! What a perfect excuse she’d found to cover up her arrival from the direction of the bedroom. Looking embarrassed, she mumbled to my grandma, “I hope it’s okay that I used your bathroom—”

“We really have to go,” I said, interrupting Rachel and giving my grandma a kiss. Then I grabbed my friend’s hand and yanked her out the door.

* * *



*What do the contents of
Grandma Miri's trunk reveal?*

"What were you doing at Grandma's?" Mom asked me when I got home. I started to tell her about our made-up school assignment to help others, but Mom cut me off.

"I know. I heard about that from Grandma. That's a very nice idea, but she says she isn't sure that was a real project."

I was offended. Me not tell the truth? I was somehow forgetting the lie I'd just told my mother—to say nothing of the lie I'd told Grandma Miri that afternoon.

"Grandma says that when she came home, she was surprised to find that all the flowerpots were dry."

Oh, no! How could we? We totally forgot!

I had no choice but to tell my mom the truth, in full. I told her about the private investigation I'd conducted with Rachel, about the number Grandma doesn't have on her arm—I told her everything. "Mom, I know that you never talk about the Holocaust, but I've got to know!" I said. "I'm not a little girl anymore—I'm going to have my bat mitzvah soon. Is Grandma Miri a survivor?"

Mom looked at me nervously for a moment. Then she smiled and gave me a kiss. "I didn't know this meant so much to you," she said. "Discussing this with Grandma is really hard. She doesn't like talking too much about that period. But maybe she'll agree to tell *you* about it. Let's try."

"Wait a minute," I said. "So if you're telling me I should talk with her, that means it's true?"

"Obviously," Mom replied with a hug.

My grandma—my sweet and cheerful grandma? My grandma? So tall and slender, elegant and beautiful—the smiling grandma who dresses exquisitely and loves going out on the town and travels around the world? My grandma, who founded an events company and managed entertainers and organized performances? She was in the Holocaust? Really?

I just couldn't believe it.