

Ordinary People

Danielle Bender

Temple Israel

Word Count – 1,000

1985

“Those things will kill you, you know.” The man stated as he approached the shadowed booth in the back of the restaurant.

“Will they?” The woman, already seated, lazily removed a cigarette from between her lips and blew a puff of smoke. As she pressed the butt of it into a nearby ashtray, extinguishing the burning tip, and then tossing it in, the woman inspected the man while he took his seat. She knew who he was; Alan Parsons had sent a letter of introduction weeks prior to this little consultation, and she had agreed to meet him at an out of the way restaurant in the middle of Nevada. Any simple passerby would hardly give the pair a look, nary a thought spared in their honor, and that was just the way she preferred it.

“May I presume you are the elusive Lana Thompson?”

“Presume away.” She responded dryly, her face hidden behind one of the tall, gilded menus set on the table.

“Would you prefer I called you Nadette?” Alan questioned, careful not to make eye contact with the woman sitting opposite him. Lana stiffened visibly, and looked directly at the well-dressed Englishman, her face a perfect façade of apathetic disinterest.

“No, that name is not mine” She replied smoothly, as she gently folded the menu and set it down in front of her. 3

“Not anymore it isn’t, but perhaps in another life...” Alan trailed off, awaiting her response.

“My other life...that is what you came to hear about, isn’t it?”

It is 1940. Nadette Meirkorp carries the crying baby out of the ghetto, its mother’s screams still echoing in her head.

“Swear to me! Swear on your life that my child will live!” The hopeless woman sobs as her baby’s savior disappears into the night.

“That your child will survive is not a promise I can make. But I can say that should your son remain here with you, he will die.” Nadette assures the woman. If she is caught, she and the baby will be killed. This is a chance that Nadette has taken hundreds of times, and is willing to take hundreds more. She feeds the baby when she returns home and puts it to sleep, aware that she needs to write before she forgets. On an unrolled parchment of cigarette paper, she quickly jots down the babies full name and the names of the parents. Alongside this she writes an address. Tomorrow she will take the boy to a new Christian home with a new Christian name. Before she does this though, Nadette takes a small leather strip fashioned into a bracelet and ties it gently around the toddler’s wrist. She cannot bear to send them off with nothing. Nadette puts the paper, now covered completely with names and numbers, in a jar filled with scraps similar to the one she places in it now. Three other jars just like this are buried in her backyard, the spot marked by an apple tree. For years since the war has started and Jewish families have been crammed into dirty, disease ridden ghettos, Nadette has made it her mission to save as many children as she could. Still, it was not enough. Too many are dying for her to make any 4

difference, and yet she continues on doing what she can. Nadette does this until the end of the war, when she subsequently informs the press where the jars are located. There are seven in total now, and the children whose parents or family are still alive after the war are reunited- despite the majority of the children having no surviving relatives. In the end, over 2,500 children have been saved. Nadette runs and hides in America, where she legally changes her name to Lana Thompson.

“Ms. Thompson you saved so many children, why have you been hiding? Don’t you want recognition?” Alan asked eagerly.

“Recognition? For what? I did what any ordinary person would do. There comes a time in everyone’s life when one must stand up for what they believe is right. When a tragedy exists around you, there are two paths you can take; stand by and let it happen, or find a way to help make it better.” Lana shook her head. “Say what you want about me in your article Mr. Parsons, call me crass or rude, but make sure you tell them I said this; if you let someone shoot an innocent right in front of you without making a move to stop it, then you may as well have pulled the trigger yourself.”

“Lana...” Alan started, checking his watch. He stood up with a grin of poorly repressed excitement plain on his face, and apparent in his demeanor. “May I show you something outside?”

“Outside?” Lana queried, wrinkling her brow as Alan led her to the front door of the restaurant, and pushed it open to let her through. Standing outside were thousands of people waving small leather bracelets in the air and cheering as they saw Lana step out. The bracelets 5

were old and worn, but the same ones Lana had given them as infants years before. In front of the crowd were bins full of unopened letters.

“All of those that couldn’t make it, or from family members of the ones who have already passed away.” Alan smiled as he stepped beside Lana. Her eyes were watering as she stood, speechless, staring out at the massive throng of survivors. “They’re all alive because of you, so don’t say you didn’t make a difference, because you saved them. All of them. And they’re grateful.”

“They’re all...they’re all the children I saved”? Lana questioned in amazement as she turned to look at Alan.

“You say you did what any ordinary person would do, and yet I find that the war was filled with ordinary people.” Alan placed his hand on Lana’s shoulder and with his other arm, gestured out to the crowd before them. “You, Lana, are extraordinary.” 6

Bibliography:

Story based loosely on article "Irena's Children"

http://www.aish.com/ho/p/Irenas_Children.html