

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/3

Sarah Prindle  
**The Star Necklace**

*Berlin, Germany*  
*November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938*

Erika Rosen was awakened in the night by the sound of shouting on the street. Her eyes flew open. She listened carefully. Had she imagined the sound? No, there it was again. People were shouting down in the street. Was there a fight going on? Another political rally? But who would stage a rally in the middle of the night?

Erika got out of bed. She knew instinctively that she had to be as quiet as possible. Erika tiptoed to her window. She pulled the curtain aside. Erika and her parents lived on the third floor of an apartment building directly across from their family's café and she realized the shouting was coming from the café.

Erika saw a mob of at least ten men swarming around the café like ants on a cookie. One of them hurled something through the front glass window. The distinctive sound of shattering glass made Erika gasp. With growing horror, she watched the men hurl more objects at the windows and the glass shards sprinkled the sidewalk.

Erika snapped out of her stupor. *I have to alert my parents!* She rushed into her parents' room. "Mama! Papa! Wake up!" She ran to her mother's side of the bed and shook her shoulders. "Mama!"

"What—Erika?" Mama jerked awake and squinted at her daughter. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Someone's attacking our café! They're breaking in right now!"

"What?" Papa threw off the covers and jumped to his feet. He ran to the living room window to peer outside.

Erika followed him, tugging her mother along with her. The family gathered around the window in time to see the shouting men going in with what looked like crowbars. Someone had painted a swastika on the café door.

"What the hell?!" Papa beelined towards the front door.

"Papa, no, don't go out there!" Erika knew her father was no match for an angry mob. She grabbed his arm.

Mama must have had the same thought as her daughter. She swiftly moved between the door and her husband. "Don't be reckless! Call the police!" She pointed towards the telephone.

Papa hesitated. Erika knew he wanted to get outside to confront the men destroying their business. But he finally came to his senses. He lunged for the telephone.

Before Papa could dial a single number, there was a hammering on the door. Erika covered her mouth to stifle her gasp. Both her parents froze. *Is the mob coming for us? What do we do? How do we defend ourselves?*

More hammering, but this time it was accompanied by a familiar voice. "Herr Rosen! Frau Rosen! It's Karl Schwartz!"

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Erika recognized the name of the teenage boy who lived in the apartment above them. The Schwartz family were one of the few families they knew who didn't treat them differently for being Jewish. Things had gotten steadily worse for the Jewish community ever since Hitler came to power.

Mama opened the door a crack and peered out. "Karl?"

Karl pushed the door open so he could speak to the whole family. His eyes were huge. He was panting as if he'd run a great distance. "Frau Rosen. Everyone...you need to hide. You need to come upstairs and hide with me and my family! They're attacking your café, and they'll be here any second! Follow me. Quickly!"

The Rosens glanced at each other. Erika could tell her parents were as unsure as she was. But Papa finally nodded. "All right, let me grab my..."

"You don't have time to bring anything with you!" Karl nearly shouted. "Come on! *Now!*"

The urgency in his tone spurred them on. Erika and her parents followed Karl out into the hallway. They hurried up the stairs to his family's apartment. Erika felt a vague flash of embarrassment for wearing her nightgown in front of the neighbors. But there was no time to change. They reached the fourth floor and Karl pushed open the front door. They hurried inside. Karl closed the door behind them and locked it securely.

Karl's parents and younger sister must have heard the commotion. They were all awake and standing around in the living room in their pajamas and nightgowns.

"What's going on?" The question came from Karl's little sister, Heidi. She was ten, but tonight she looked much younger. More like a terrified six-year-old.

Karl took a deep breath. "Something happened tonight. A German official was shot and killed by a Jewish man. Once news of it spread, angry Nazi supporters started a rampage. They're attacking Jewish businesses and homes. They're arresting men. The nearest synagogue has been burned down..."

Mama put her hands to her cheeks. Papa stared in mute shock. Erika couldn't believe it. She'd assumed the attack on the café was an isolated incident. Now it sounded like this was something much bigger and more frightening.

"They might attack your apartment," Karl went on. "You should stay here with us until the riots end."

He had just finished speaking when there was the sound of a SLAM and hurried footsteps in the stairwell.

"Hide!" Frau Schwartz pulled open the nearest closet and ushered the Rosens inside. "Don't speak, just stay quiet!" She swung the door closed once they were inside. The Rosens were left in darkness.

Not being able to see meant that their other senses rushed to compensate. Erika could hear shouts and running footsteps one floor below. There was a hammering sound that Erika recognized as their front door. The

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same door Karl had knocked on mere minutes ago. Then a CRASH as the door was broken down.

Erika and her parents crouched down in the dark. Erika clung to her parents like she used to as a child. They listened in horror as their home was ransacked by the mob. Most frightening were the words the intruders were yelling. "Where are the Jews?" "Find them!" "Look in there!" "Heil Hitler!" The words were punctuated by glass breaking and objects being thrown around.

*What if they look for us up here? What if they check all the neighboring apartments? What will they do to us if they find us?* Erika clenched her teeth and squeezed her eyes shut.

The ransacking below seemed to last for hours. But only a few minutes went by before the mob left the apartment. The family could hear them yelling about "taking back Germany" as they moved on to their next target.

The Rosens stayed in the closet for several more minutes. Erika was afraid the rioters would return. But Frau Schwartz finally opened the door and gestured for them to come out. Erika's legs shook as she made her way to the sofa and sat beside Heidi. Mama sat on the other side of her. Her face had gone white.

"You're welcome to spend the night here," Frau Schwartz whispered. "It probably won't be safe to go back until tomorrow."

Papa nodded wordlessly. He looked grimly over at his wife and daughter. He had relatives in England who'd been begging them to get out of Germany while they still could. "Germany is our home," he'd always replied. "We're staying here." Erika wondered if he was regretting that decision now.

The country didn't feel one bit like home tonight. Germany had turned its back on them.



The Rosens didn't go back to their apartment until noon the next day. They came in through the broken door. They looked around in shocked silence. Erika could barely recognize the home in which she had grown up. It looked utterly unfamiliar, not unlike the country that she had once been proud of.

The furniture had all been overturned or smashed. The kitchen table lay on its side with its legs broken. Splinters of wood around the table were all that was left of the chairs. The couch had been ripped apart. Its stuffing was strewn about. Family pictures lay broken on the floor.

They checked the rest of the apartment. Drawers had been yanked out of the dressers. The clothes and supplies stored in them had been emptied onto the floor.

Erika's room was a mess. Her books and school supplies were all over the place. Her sheets and blanket had been ripped to shreds. It was an unbelievable violation to know strangers had burst into their apartment and torn through their stuff like a tornado.

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What was worse was learning that this had not just happened in Berlin. It had occurred throughout the whole country. Houses and businesses had been ransacked. Synagogues had been burned to the ground. Jewish men had been beaten and taken to concentration camps. Women and children had been raped and threatened. The media was calling it Kristallnacht, "Crystal night", or "night of broken glass." The world had turned upside down in one night.

"My jewelry has been stolen!" Mama called from her room.

"So has our silver," Papa shouted from the kitchen.

Erika sifted through the debris of her bedroom and realized that the drawer where she kept her necklaces and earrings was empty.

Had the rioters taken the jewelry to sell? Or had they given them to their own family and friends as gifts? Erika thought of her pearl necklace and emerald earrings being worn by the family members of the rioters. She imagined one of the men going up to his wife or mother and saying, "I found this for you! I took it from a Jew's room." Would their wife or mother be horrified by what they'd done? Or would they be proud and eagerly accept the stolen jewelry?

Erika shoved the drawer closed. It was then she noticed something glinting on the floor. She bent down to look.

Erika was startled to recognize the silver Star of David necklace that had been a gift from her mother for her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday nearly eleven months ago. Had the thieves dropped it? Or had they decided not to take something with a Jewish symbol on it? Erika didn't know and didn't care. She picked up the necklace and clutched it to her chest.

She heard footsteps approach her room. When Erika looked up, she saw Papa. He looked older than he had the day before. "We're going to England, Erika. Your mother and I discussed it last night. We can't stay here."

"I know." That was all she could say. The police had made no effort to stop the rioters the night before. They'd stood aside and watched synagogues burn. They'd helped arrest innocent Jews. The government clearly wouldn't protect them from future attacks. They had to leave while they could.

Erika clasped the star necklace around her neck. She tucked the pendant underneath her shirt so no one else could see it.

It was safer that way.

*Ohio, USA  
May 2024*

Hayley Feldmann winced as she stood in front of the bicycle shop her family owned. She took in the damage that had been done sometime overnight. The sign for **Feldmann's Bikes** had been obscured by a large black swastika that had been spray painted on it. The windows were broken. Glass was scattered all over the sidewalk.

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Hayley's parents and two older brothers stood near her. The family watched the police comb through the store for evidence as to who had carried out this hate crime.

There was no doubt as to this being a hate crime. Someone had spray-painted *Get out Jews* onto the brick wall. *The coward that did this didn't even write it correctly.* Hayley thought bitterly. *It should read 'get out, Jews'.*

There had been an increase in antisemitism in the country since the October 7<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack and the subsequent war on Gaza. Hayley hated to see anyone suffer no matter if they were Israeli or Palestinian. Lately some of her classmates had made odd comments and assumed she must be okay with the Gaza bombings because she was Jewish.

"I just want peace and safety for everyone," was Hayley's response to angry or confrontational comments. But it didn't seem to be enough.

She didn't know who had vandalized her family's shop. Was it someone who assumed they hated Palestinians? Had it been a neo-Nazi? The result was the same either way. Destruction. Hatred. Fear.

"I can't believe this happened," Hayley murmured. She felt like a scared little girl.

"I know, sweetie," Mom put an arm around her shoulders. "We'll clean everything up and put things back together. It'll be like new."

"Until the next time," her oldest brother, Alan, muttered. "Assuming we don't get driven out, that is."

"That's not helpful, Alan," Mom spoke in a warning tone.

"We're one of the few Jewish families in this town," Alan waved an arm to encompass Main Street and the other shops and houses visible from their vantage point. "And I don't know about you, but I don't feel safe anymore."

*Neither do I. Is the vandal still nearby? Is he watching us?* The idea gave Hayley the creeps.

Her other brother, Everett, chimed in, "This is like what our ancestors went through, isn't it? Kristallnacht."

Hayley hadn't thought of that. But now she realized there was a striking similarity. Great-grandmother Erika and her parents had had to flee Germany after Kristallnacht. They'd waited out the war in the English countryside with relatives. Then they moved to America in 1948.

Hayley had wondered if something like that could ever happen to her. But it had seemed so long ago. Kristallnacht had happened in a different country. She hadn't really worried that much. She'd noticed an uptick in antisemitism since the 2016 election. It seemed to grow with every new conspiracy theory that popped up on the internet. Things had gotten even worse since the Israel-Gaza war began.

*Will things keep getting worse? Will we have to flee the country? Will we have to start from scratch in a foreign land?*

Hayley reached up to touch the silver Star of David that hung from a chain around her neck. Great-grandmother Erika had found it in the ruins

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of her family's apartment. Hayley used to wear the necklace so that it was visible to all. But not anymore. She kept it tucked underneath her shirt now.

It was just safer that way.

But Hayley dared to hope that it wouldn't be this way forever.