The Sound of the Unseen

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Abstract

This work of fiction explores the themes of relational dynamics, oppression, intergenerational trauma, and the healing and self-actualisation that can be obtained by helping others. It incorporates numerous historical references that tie in to the characters' stories or otherwise enhance the narrative. The main thread running throughout the entire work is music. Music as cultural signifier, cultural anchor and identifier, and particularly, musical terminology as chapter titles because of how perfectly such terms capture mood, direction, or intent for each chapter. It is crucial to note that while all the characters in the stories that follow are fictitious, the historical events and places are represented as accurately as possible according to extensive research. One historical figure, Tomás de Torquemada, is fictionalized herein, but his role is accurately representative of the role he played historically. Other historical figures, Johann Sebastian Bach and Joseph Beer, have been fictionalized in relation to characters in the story, yet their depictions as musicians are accurate. And Anna is based on an historical figure from the Polish Jewish Resistance; however, her relational story is fictionalised.

Keywords

Oppression, displacement, place, relationships, history, trauma, sexual abuse

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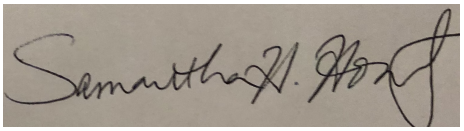
Declaration

I, Samantha H. Horwitz, declare that *The Sound of the Unseen* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



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This thesis has been submitted to Turnitin and has been approved by the supervisor.

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Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

George Santayana

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First Movement

Allegro, ma non troppo

Italian for 'cheerful, but not too much'. In music, it indicates a fast, but not too fast, tempo.

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The wicked person says, ‘What is this observance to *you*?’ Since he says ‘to *you*’ and not ‘to us’, he rejects essentials of our faith: the unity of God, and the community of Israel. To him *we* respond sharply: ‘It is because of what the Lord did for *me* when *I* went forth from Egypt -- ‘for *me*’, that is, and not ‘for *you*’ for had you been there, you would not have known redemption.

The New Union Passover Haggadah

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Da Capo al Coda

Italian for 'from head to tail'. Used in musical notation to navigate a complex repeat.

The Girl

One

I threw myself out of a window when I was four. To get away from the bees in my head.

Also, I thought maybe I could fly.

After that I wore a helmet for a while. Mother used to shush me when I would start to tell people about the bees. But she heard them too. She told me. They were her pointy thoughts. So sharp they gave her headaches.

If I squinted at her, I could see them. Sticking out of her ears desperate to escape.

Two

When I was little, Mother played piano. She never said, but I knew it was to quiet her pointy thoughts. It was the piano her parents had bought when they got married soon after my grandmother had moved to New York. When she had had to leave Europe and her memory behind.

Mother always used to warm up with scales. I liked that scales hid no surprises.

Once her fingers were limber, Mother would play songs. Usually some Yiddish music my grandmother had played for her when she was little. Each hand played its part while her voice flew above it all. Oh, how her hands were independent. How her voice was swirling smoke just made for a cabaret.

But Jewish music is almost always in a minor key. The echo of millions of souls collectively anticipating the worst.

Eventually, Mother would go to the kitchen to transform ground beef into dinner.

Three

The jaw of the piano bench unhinged to swallow sheet music. It was covered in a needlepoint my grandmother had made, born of a dream she told me about. That she used to have. After.

Demons and dragons. Flickering flames and shades of bruises.

On days when the angels who look after small things smiled on me, Mother would play *Schneglochen*, a duet I could stumble through with her. I would always smile up at her at the end, my lips a question mark.

She smelled of fresh laundry and jasmine. We could make snow fall from the keys. Every couple of bars, she would reshape my hand to hold an invisible egg and lift my wrist like a ballerina's. Just so.

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I had started to learn music a couple months before. Mother never counted while she played piano. So we were rarely in the same place in the music. We would tiptoe to the final bar, laughing as we tripped over the end.

Go practice flute, she would say, closing the keyboard cover. I would shuffle to my room and pour breath into sound.

Four

Every Saturday morning of my childhood, unless I was sick, Mother and I went to synagogue. We wore our best dresses. Mother would be in her vintage cloche hat, and I in pigtails. She threw her heart into her voice during services, while I counted pages until the last hymn.

We would pass the same congregants on our way to the sanctuary. Always, this one old man would seek us out. Shabbat Shalom, y'all, he would say with a bit of evening cheer in his voice. He would clasp my hand for a moment too long. Then he would ask how we were.

She's learning to play the flute, Mother told him one day.

She's such a pretty little girl, he said.

Five

Beethoven wrote a bagatelle, a bit of musical fluff, for a student of his named Therese. He loved her and asked her to marry him.

Ludwig Nohl, who discovered and published this piece forty years after Beethoven's death, got her name wrong.

This piece of music, *Für Elise,* was published fifty-seven years after Therese rejected Beethoven's proposal.

Six

I lived in a plaintive house. But if Mother felt festive, she would play Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*.

The sound of trees whispering to each other underground. A fire. Secret and slow.

But I didn't know how to make the flute burn like that.

She insisted piano was in my blood. She would point to middle C on the piano and on the sheet music and tell me to figure it out. But the flute was what I wanted to play.

Sometimes I plucked my way through her childhood songbooks. Their pages were covered with music in major keys. Each key with a different shape, colour, mood.

A requiem, a bagatelle, and a tango cannot share a key.

Seven

I would often come home from school to find Mother and Grandma seated at the piano, arguing about who had messed up their rendition of *Schneglochen*. Cigarettes dangled from their identical lips. Raspy laughs chased the smoke.

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Grandma would sigh. Lament that she had not become the concert pianist she had dreamed of becoming. Before.

Eight

I was practicing early in the morning on the day of a middle school music competition.

Mother's body filled the doorway as she eyeballed me, a cigarette in one hand and a mug of coffee in the other.

In the dim light of dawn, my nervous playing broke the cold air.

I looked up. Awaited judgment.

She shrugged. Told me not to expect the best grade. Don't court disappointment.

Nine

One day, the synagogue's youth group leader was driving me home from a dance. He told me he would marry me if he could. He said I was mature for my age. He admired that.

I was thirteen.

Ten

Three years later, my friend and I were in my bedroom playing guitar. The phone rang and on the other end was a synagogue member my parents' age. I told him I would get Mother.

No, it's you I want. You looked very pretty the other day. I'd like to take you to dinner.

I felt thousands of wings flapping under my skin. I scanned the walls for the answer.

My friend's eyes screamed.

I told the man I wasn't allowed to date. I stammered that I had to go.

But I could not make myself be rude and put the phone down.

So my friend did and then insisted I tell my parents.

My eyes burned. But I did not get up. He said he was going to tell them because they had to know.

So I went and told them.

They said they were disappointed that I had led this man to believe I wanted to date him.

Eleven

I went back to my room. Smashed the guitar on the bedpost. I have never played a guitar since.

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Cadenza

Italian for ‘cadence’. In music, it indicates a virtuosic solo.

The Girl

One

My grandfather of many, many generations before was a potato farmer in Ukraine. His grandfather of many generations before had been taken to Rome as an enslaved man from Judaea. Rome fell, and its former slaves migrated. There was no point in returning to a homeland from which they had been expunged.

Not when the potatoes needed harvesting.

Two

Eventually, my ancestors in Ukraine realised how unwelcome they were. The Cossacks, a group of Orthodox Christians there, were unwilling to offer to any of the Jewish families who had lived there for generations the compassion of a God whom they believed the Jews had killed.

Blood demanded blood.

The Pogroms of 1648 were the Cossacks’ solution to the Jewish problem. For my family and countless other Jews, life again became unliveable. So they wandered.

Silesia took them in. The great-grandson of my Ukrainian grandfather of many, many generations ago learned the silk trade and flourished, as did his fellow Jews. Their wealth threatened the status quo.

Silesia countered this threat with heavy taxes on the Jews. Silesia’s coffers swelled. Peace followed prosperity.

But Jewish wealth eventually brought suspicion and scrutiny as their success left Silesians grasping. The poverty of the many sparked punitive laws against the Jews. Blood again demanded blood.

And once again, my family wandered.

Three

They sought refuge in neighbouring Prussia, which opened its arms to Jewish trade, eager to embrace Jewish wealth. Prussia taxed the Jews heavily, and grew wealthy itself. My family and all the other Jewish merchants had no choice but to raise their prices. Already impoverished Prussians resented these price hikes, which spread to the rest of the market. Soon the price of a loaf of bread rose out of reach.

A dance with intricate steps. Follow them with precision. And stay.

Usefulness and forbearance are the two sides of a golden coin. The king whose benevolence came from pockets overflowing ensured the peaceful coexistence of those who believed in the son of God and those who believed in before.

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Until.

A new king donned the crown. Frederick William I. He had not inherited his father's benevolence. He reigned with harsh and punitive laws. Coloured by his contempt for outsiders who would not come in.

This king's hatred left no room for love of music.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote prolifically under his reign.

Four

At the end of Bach's tenure as court musician in Weimar, his employer, the Duke, had him imprisoned for the offence of having resigned his post. Bach's temper had more than a month in prison to lose its heat.

During his imprisonment, he wrote 'The Well-Tempered Clavier'. An exploration of all twenty-four major and minor keys. A fresco of sound traversing from darkness to light.

In his new job, Bach dreamed the Brandenburg concerti for Christian Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg.

The Margrave's sole duty was to protect his people from outsiders.

The six Concerti, each in a major key.

Bright as brass. But yielding. Like children stooped beneath the light on their shoulders.

They were musical scores naked with ambition, calling for more instruments than any concerto before.

All to honour a man with no budget for music, who was the subject of a king with no appetite for art.

Five

It is family lore that my however-many-great-grandfather knew Bach. Made clothing for him in the finest brocade. Heavy silk damask. Only the best for the maestro. At only the best prices. A Jewish tailor had expectations to meet.

One day, this ancestor of mine dared to plink a few keys of Bach's harpsichord while he waited to fit the maestro. His fingers wandered into a major key.

Music from inside his head filled the room triumphant and worshipful.

Until Bach's shadow encroached.

Without a word, the Maestro closed the lid of the keyboard. And dismissed with the flick of his hand the man who had clothed him for years.

Then Bach wove the tailor's leitmotif into a flute sonata in G minor. Jews dwell in minor keys.

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Six

Grandma also liked to tell me how, two centuries later, my great-grandfather saw himself as a proud German. He had shed centuries of enslavement like used up skin. He stepped into a future written in major keys.

He remained a member of the mercantile class. But, as a furrier, his privilege was to clothe the wealthy. And he basked in their favour.

An outsider, trespassing. Eventually the minuet refused to tolerate the dirge.

Seven

Grandma told me this story so often, I felt like I had been there. Almost like it had happened to me. When she was a little girl, she mastered Brandenburg concerto number three, transcribed for piano. Bach wrote it in G major, a key purple with majesty.

Her parents required this performance to entertain guests at their annual Christmas party. Both events were yardsticks of progress.

That year, 1932, fewer people came. Her papa's acquaintances had thinned like middle aged hair.

The snow outside was the snow of deep winter chill. Hard pellets rather than cotton fluff. It tapped against the salon's windows, then melted. Snowmelt dripped down, captured into rivulets made by chance.

The family put so much work into a pantomime to impress the people they served. The night ended early when Father Christmas failed to appear. My Jewish Grandma's family Christmas tree remained bare.

Before shuffling to bed, Grandma's papa put the *mezuzot* back on their doorposts.

Her mama sang a soft Yiddish lullaby.

Shlof mayn kind, mayn treyst mayn sheyner,
Shlof zhe, lyu-lyu-lyu!
Shlof mayn lebn, mayn kadish eyner, Shlof zhe, zunenyu.

Grandma floated to sleep atop the gentle, yet wistful, tune.

Eight

The 30th of January 1933. The Day of the Takeover.

The Weimar Republic officially ceded power to the Nazis, who processed with torches through the Brandenburg gate. Music drove the crowd into a frenzy.

The trumpet, destroyer of Jericho's walls, announced the new regime. Old laws and divisions were reborn again.

Nine

Grandma told me that the next morning, the morning after the Takeover, she awoke to voices raised in what sounded to her little girl ears like anger, but that she came to understand was terror. She heard her parents speak of boycott posters that said Jews were

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a pestilence. That said German citizens must support German purity. Her Mama and Papa debated the meaning of being German.

She spied on them. Saw how their chests heaved. Sighs and sobs looked the same. Their lips pressed into thin hard lines as resignation replaced fear.

Grandma hid in a cupboard as her mama and papa compressed grand lives into the smallest of valises. It turned out, the necessities were few.

Grandma's papa said everyone could take one special thing. The one special thing that would make a new land home.

He plucked the holy scrolls from all the *mezuzot*. Kissed them, his eyes closed. Even as young as she was, Grandma knew supplication when she saw it. Her papa tucked the scrolls into the innermost pockets of his coat.

Grandma's mama chose a tiny sketch by Sister Hummel. Happy children holding hands in a field.

Grandma brought her metronome.

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Fugue

From French ‘to run away’. In music, a piece for two or more voices written in contrapuntal form, with a theme and variations thereof.

Conrad

One

My mother, Marjorie Agnes Lyons, and her eight siblings, were raised to be devoted to the Catholic Church. Mom got pregnant at sixteen, though, and her parents sent her to have the baby at her aunt’s house on the other side of the country.

The baby got lucky. She was adopted by a nice older couple. Mom never got a chance to see her, but at least she knew she would have a good life.

Mom’s parents would not let her return to their home. She told me she had created a rift no act of penance could bridge.

Two

In 1962, György Ligeti wrote ‘Poème symphonique’, a cacophony of one hundred metronomes set to different speeds.

Mom thought I didn’t know why she listened to it all the time. But I did know.

The fireworks of sound drove away the bees in her head.

Three

Mom left her aunt’s house when she turned eighteen, after graduating high school as the town disgrace. She moved to Washington, DC and waited tables in the shadow of government. It took her six years to put herself through college, but she finally earned a degree in art history. Then she got a job as a secretary for some lawyer at the Federal Trade Commission who preferred when she wore short skirts. She used all her vacation time to travel abroad. She never looked more alive than when she told me about her travels.

One day, she met my father. A Marine who had fought in Vietnam. I always knew that she didn’t so much fall in love as figured he would do. They got married at the courthouse during their lunch hour on a Wednesday in August. Three years later, they had me, Conrad, Jr. Seven years later, a girl they named after the angels.

When I was born, mom’s first baby was sixteen.

Four

When I was little, I liked to be alone with my thoughts surrounded by my stuffed animals. They were my friends, my confidants, my orchestra. I waved around a stick I had whittled smooth as a baton. Music was the only thing that soothed me when the shouting started.

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To keep time while I conducted these symphonies, I used the metronome mom had bought from an antiques dealer in London. On one of her trips before she met my father. The metronome was a triangle with rounded corners, with a sharp triangle design on its cover. It was old and still kept time perfectly. Mom always polished it to a shine I could see my reflection in.

It was her precious thing. Not mine to touch.

Five

Every evening, my father would drink too much. He'd become either a clown or a bully. Much as I tried, I never could figure out what determined which one emerged when his carapace cracked open.

Most of the time, my father would interrogate mom about her past. He'd shout that he knew her single life pulled her. He could see the wandering in her eyes.

Mom ignored him as she did the washing up.

Six

On evenings when I wasn't an altar server, I would hang out by myself in the living room. Playing piano or reading some book. Mostly just trying to make myself invisible.

My father's habit on those nights was to take his seat in the recliner, crack open another beer. And stare at me. His son.

If I really was his son, he would mutter. Like I couldn't hear him. Or maybe, like he wanted me to.

What I could hear was his gaze. I couldn't stop myself from chewing my bottom lip. No matter how he growled with irritation. I usually stopped only once a canine tooth tore through and blood beaded at the surface. I would lick it away satisfied.

Always, always, always I would brace for the blow.

Seven

As part of the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese had fought for three weeks in Hue. Along the Perfume River.

More than a hundred Marines had died in the fight for US and South Vietnamese forces to regain control of the ancient citadel.

My father saw half his platoon get cut down like hay.

That had to have put bees in his head. He tried tried tried to drown them with beer. I don't think any amount of beer could do that, though.

Eight

On nights when I was an altar server, I felt like the scapegoat sent to Azazel. I prayed and prayed for anyone but Father Carlyle to be the celebrant. I had heard from other altar servers about him. Whispered rumours. People knew. They just didn't want to know. He hadn't tried anything with me. But the way he licked his lips when he saw me gave me the willies.

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That evening. Father Carlyle was already in his vestments by the time I arrived. I rushed to change clothes in the glare of his eyes crawling over my skin.

Only a few people showed up for Mass that rainy Wednesday evening, so it was over quickly. Too quickly. I didn't want to be back in the vestry with him. I took each of the sacred vessels used for Holy Communion to the sacristy. I washed each one like it was a newborn. Dread planted its seed in my gut. I made sure that the water drained properly. The dread sprouted. I double checked that the water had drained straight into the soil. I mean, I went outside and checked. With feet of lead dragging at each step. That plant kept sprouting in my gut.

I feared. I prayed. I hoped.

Father Carlyle, full of beatific patience, was waiting in the vestry.

I had to change out of my vestments and into my clothing. I had to.

First, I peeled off the surplice as if it were the skin of an angel. I smoothed it so it wouldn't crease. The plant in my gut reached down my legs and squeezed my feet bloodless.

I then unbuttoned each of the cassock's thirty-three buttons. One for each of Christ's years on Earth. How I tried to stretch time. I hung the cassock as carefully as I had been taught. More carefully even. And yet, the plant of dread's tentacles grabbed me around the neck.

Father Carlyle cleared his throat. Blocked the door with his potato body. I couldn't look up as I reached to help him disrobe. My breath hung in my chest. My hands trembled as I untied the cincture over his cassock. Father Carlyle grabbed my wrist and forced my hand to the bulge waiting there.

Nine

The next day at school, we continued our discussion of the Vietnam War in history class. I was thankful for the distraction. And then ashamed that I felt gratitude for something so horrific. And more shame still that I didn't think it had been a just war.

It took US forces more than seven years to destroy the Thanh Hoa bridge, which spanned the Ma river in Hanoi. Locals had dubbed it 'Dragon's Jaw'. It was critical for the transport of North Vietnamese supplies.

It also was where local children drowned when the angels who look after swimming things closed their eyes for too long. Most days, shamans knelt by the riverbank. Casting prayers to the river gods for help to find the bodies. To bring peace to families who would never again know peace.

French colonists built the original bridge. Communists destroyed it in 1945. Replaced it with a bridge both durable and resilient. Thirteen US airmen were killed or missing in action during those seven years of North Vietnamese tenacity, and seven more endured torture in the 'Hanoi Hilton'.

To this day, Vietnamese parents tell their children tales of the *ma da*, spirits of the drowned, who haunt lakes and rivers.

Ten

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When I got home from church, I could hear my parents' voices from the sidewalk. I walked to the back door to avoid them if they were in the kitchen, but as I crept up the stairs, I realised they were in their bedroom.

I showered for longer than I was allowed. I checked that my sister was sleeping and slipped into my bed.

I clenched my eyes. Put my head under the pillow. Still, mom's cries and my father's grunts filtered into my bedroom.

In my dreams that night, I saw the bloated bodies of the drowned, eyes pleading for help.

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Arpeggio

From Italian 'to play the harp'. In music, it indicates a broken chord whose notes are played in succession.

The Girl

One

Everyone in my family has been a musician. Anyone who was worth it, at least. That's what Grandma said. And according to her, we were always drawn to the piano. Before the piano was invented, my forebears played the harpsichord, the clavier, any stringed instrument with a keyboard. Grandma told me at least once a week that a long-ago ancestor played with Bach. But who can say if that's true.

What was definitely true is the fire that burned inside my grandmother to be a concert pianist.

But then the Nazis came.

And she fled with her parents. And lived.

Okay. Survived.

And she gave life to my mother.

Two

My first act of treachery was to choose flute over piano. Such behaviour could only have been the mark of the evil eye, Grandma would say. And she would spit three times to dispel the evil.

Superstition hung around my grandmother's neck. She wore an amulet. A gold *hamsa* on a chain. The hand of God. To ward off evil.

It is against Jewish law to be buried wearing jewellery, the woman who prepared Grandma's body told my mother.

Mother. Well. She was Mother. A singularity.

Grandma was buried wearing the *hamsa*.

Three

Grandma took me to the ballet when I was little. I remember the glee of running to the orchestra pit to see the musicians. The magicians. That's what they were to me.

The flute was the sound of flowers opening. The sound of secrets in the wind. Floating above everything else.

We saw *Giselle*. Those Wilis. Dead maidens clad in white and betrayal. They haunt me still.

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Four

The flute’s sound comes solely from the musician’s breath and muscles. No mouthpiece. No reed. No strings or hammers. Nothing between the instrument and musician.

Five

Composers use the flute’s vocal qualities to express emotions ranging from dark to light. The flute’s sound can be rounded or pointy. It can soar above its accompaniment, or play games with it.

It is a bird. Or night itself.

The flute demands. Requires. Exacts. Its reward is the music of the souls of the redeemed.

It can also play only broken chords.

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Diminuendo

From Italian ‘to decrease’. In music, it indicates a decrease in volume.

Conrad

One

I didn’t realise I was chewing my bottom lip until my right canine drew blood. I just licked it away satisfied.

But even that pain failed to settle my nerves. It didn’t help that she was sitting there gaping at me. Her eyes caverns in her pale face. Her body lost in a black pantsuit. A widow without a body to bury.

I wondered if she’d always looked so mournful. If it was her nature. Or if it was because.

Two

I cleared my throat, which was another hangover from childhood. It gave me time, just the one moment I’d need to make sense of the letters swimming on the page. Thank God I wouldn’t be able to see the reporters through the loud glare of the TV lights.

I need to get this perfect, I told her. It’s your story. Those people out there need to hear it before.

Before he tells his side I thought. But didn’t say.

Three

It galled me that this story had to have two sides. But I’d long ago accepted the rules of the prosecution game.

So many stories.

I couldn’t untwine hers from all those I needed to leave buried.

A man, grunting. A woman, crying.

I turned on music to silence my thoughts. I had to focus on my job of putting sex offenders in prison, turning victimisers into victims in a panopticon hell. That satisfied me to my bones. And made my gut twist from sounds I could never unhear.

But that was from my own before.

Best left alone.

Four

Right, let’s do this.

I offered her a hand, which she ignored. I had to admire her comportment. Her dancer’s posture gave her the appearance of height. And a slight haughtiness I was worried would look like contempt.

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We walked without words through the long corridor that led to the press briefing area in the Commonwealth Attorney's office in Charlottesville, Virginia. Two hours away from the real power in Washington. Two hours away from where I should've been by now.

It could have been light years.

Five

I took my place at the lectern. She stood behind me, off to the side. I glanced back at her. Her calm unnerved me. Her face was a death mask.

I took a deep breath.

I'm here to tell you that the office of the Commonwealth Attorney is committed to the pursuit of justice, no matter how relentless that pursuit may be, and no matter where it may lead. No one, including the son of the provost of the university, is above the law. Our investigation has uncovered unsettling information, which will come out at trial, which was set to start tomorrow. This morning, however, the judge granted the defendant's motion for an extension for one week.

Obviously, the defendant will tell a story at trial. But we will be vigilant with the truth. No one deserves to experience what she has gone through. Her life has been destroyed.

Six

I glanced back at her again. Her face was impassive. Her owl eyes unblinking. But I knew she was furious. She'd been adamant that I not claim her life was destroyed.

But she just didn't get it. You have to know how to play the game.

Even when facts are on your side, you have to package them. Just because her grandparents had been through worse in Germany didn't mean that the life she had known hadn't been destroyed. How well she endured the aftermath wasn't the subject of litigation.

Seven

It occurred to me that in every life, there was a before and then an after.

Eight

I bit my lip again. Tasted copper and salt. My mind flashed to my father talking about the My Lai massacre in 1968. How that had set Americans against their own. How the actions of a few defined the many because sometimes those actions are so depraved, their violence taints everyone around them.

Over drinks the other night, the president of the University of Virginia had asked me to drop the case. To let the university judiciary system handle it, even though the worst it could do would be to expel the boy. The man.

I could hear the reproach in her voice when I referred to her attacker as a boy. But I couldn't get past the fact they were both kids. Fourth-year undergrads. Two lives ruined in the pursuit of justice.

But that boy chose when his before ceded to his after.

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Nine

I put aside those thoughts. Forced myself to focus on the reporters.

I want to end with a comment about the rumours I'm sure you've all heard. No, I'm not planning to run for Commonwealth Attorney of Charlottesville. I value my job as an Assistant, and I respect my boss tremendously. I would never use a sensational case as a launchpad for a political career. I won't be taking questions. Thank you.

Ten

I walked away and she followed. We ignored the cacophony of trailing reporters. Once we were in my office, I looked her over. Her expression remained unchanged. She reminded me of those heads on Easter Island. I, on the other hand, was covered in a sheen of sweat. Her silence hung like an empty noose.

Again, my mind wandered to how she might've been before. Was a look from her always so loud?

My assistant will phone you to set up a meeting the day before the trial starts. In the meantime, if you need anything.

She shook her head, thanked me, and left. The sound of her voice. For even that brief moment, it startled me.

Eleven

My thoughts pinballed in my head. I turned my mind to the music I had left playing. Wagner, the one composer my father and I both enjoyed. Her case has nothing to do with me, I reproached myself. I needed to maintain my professional distance.

But I coudn't help where my thoughts took me.

My mind drifted from the vestry of the church I grew up attending to the image of my sister. That night. That first night.

She looked like the angels for whom she was named. I had just gotten home from evening Mass. With Father Carlyle.

She was little.

Asleep.

I turned up the music, took a swig of cold coffee and turned to my computer to work on my opening statement. I had to make sure it hit its mark. In the sterile world of the bar exam, the defendant ticked every box for the crime of rape. He had restrained a woman walking home from a party, causing injury to her head and neck while doing so, and had sex with her without her consent. Hell, without even her knowledge. If those were the only facts to confront the jury, my job would be easy.

Twelve

I remembered how I was unable to get away from the voices in the kitchen. That night. Sounding like a tornado.

Again, I forced myself to turn to the present.

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The accused was the son of the provost of one of the most prestigious public universities in the country. He was a descendant of one of the so-called first families of Virginia. The fact that his great-great-grandfather enslaved people who had helped build the University side by side with people Jefferson had enslaved should not have conferred honour. But it did. This kid -- this man -- managed to be a top engineering student and a respected student leader, helped in no small way by his generic blondness and ability to set the track ablaze.

And yet.

Thirteen

This was the crux of the problem for trial. Make the defendant sing in his true key, the key of a monster, rather than in the clear sunshine of an imposter key.

My God, I should have just showered and gone straight to bed that night.

Fourteen

The accuser was a different story. According to her roommates, she was always very quiet. Studious. Rarely drank. All these facts broke in her favour. So what the hell was she doing that night? Out at a frat party, she got drunk beyond all reason. Witnesses said she had a screaming fight with one of her friends and just ran out the door and stumbled. The accused caught her as she was about to trip into traffic. He offered to walk her home.

One moment. Just one moment. All that stood between before and after.

Fifteen

The accused's story is that she was quiet, and a bit weird, but pretty in an unconventional way with her black hair and pale skin. He was surprised when she started kissing and groping him. In public no less. But he responded like any red-blooded American male would.

Her story was that he threw her down. She bashed her head on the pavement. Lost consciousness. And then he had sex with her unconscious body.

Sixteen

I gulped some more cold coffee. Closed my eyes. Memory just wouldn't shut up.

A white nightgown.

Trimmed with eyelet lace.

A feeling of being pulled.

I opened my eyes.

I'd just procured a video of the attack from one of the witnesses. It showed that another witness pulled the defendant off of the victim and called an ambulance while the victim lay there, not moving and bleeding from her head injury. It took several moments before the defendant had even bothered to pull up his pants. The weeklong delay was to argue the admissibility of this video. Without it, I didn't like my chances. Even with it, I couldn't be sure of the outcome. Which was absurd. But I expected the absurd.

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I hadn’t known my sister didn’t wear panties under her nightgown.

How smooth. How pale her flesh was.

There. There.

Like the belly of a trout.

Cold sweat slithered between my shoulder blades. I started to pace my office. Back and forth. Trying to unsee what I had done. My finger inside. Just for a moment. Before she had stirred and I had run out.

Seventeen

I switched off the music. Sat motionless. I breathed deeply and heard them again. My father’s grunts. Mom’s cries.

That night while I tried to go to sleep after.

That night.

Like so many others.

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Forte

From French for ‘strong’. In music, the term denotes a louder volume.

The Girl

One

Time unravelled that night. First, the party I hadn’t even wanted to go to. Let myself get talked into. Then a fight. A total blur. Followed by rage. Red and raw in my wake as I ran out.

This man. He ran after me. Wanted to walk me home. I said no. Tried to walk away.

He grabbed my arm. Threw me down like I would bounce.

Two

I inhaled soil as I choked on the blood flooding my mouth.
His arm was pressed against my neck.
Breath after breath after breath, he thrusted into me.
It felt like forever.

Three

And more.

Four

The emergency room. Bright lights and a jumble of voices. And then. Silence.
They told me I lost consciousness. But I know better.
The me inside left.

Five

When my great-grandma was young and beautiful, she ran away to Vienna to sing and dance in musicals. Grandma had a picture of her on her mantle. I used to study that picture when I was little, mesmerised by how my great-grandmother’s bobbed hair framed the mischief in her eyes. On stage, she wore dresses cut up to here. She was all legs and glorious voice.

The family scandal is that she had an affair with Joseph Beer, a Viennese Jewish composer who wrote musicals. Her parents summoned her home to Berlin when they heard.

She loved my great-grandpa, but her eyes always smiled when she hummed one of those show tunes.

Six

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When I was in high school, I found my family's scandal fascinating and read all I could about Joseph Beer. It turned out that when the Nazis came to Vienna in 1938, Joseph ran. First to Paris. Then to Nice after Paris fell. He survived by becoming someone else. Selling his music to others to pass off as their own.

Joseph became someone else so that he could see his mother and father and sister again.

In 1944 when the Allies liberated Nice, Joseph could reclaim himself. Put his own name on his music. And yet.

He discovered the Nazis had murdered his mother and father and sister in Auschwitz.

He never composed again.

Seven

The tin can voice of the university president woke me out of my morphine haze.

To tell me not to press charges. To let the university take care of it.

It.

I was not ready to inhabit my body, so I drifted back into that delicious haze. I had heard him. But I didn't speak.

I know that man thought I was being obstinate. He didn't know that I had given up on language.

Eight

When I was little, I stuttered. The flute let me speak. But dancing let me fly.

One day, someone said I was too chubby to wear a leotard. I quit dancing that day. Told Mother it hurt my feet.

She knew I was lying. But I could see agreement in her eyes. She let me quit without argument.

You can't help that you got your shape from your father's side, she told me.

Nine

Dance is fluid and strong. My chubby thighs used to launch me into space and let me land as softly as snow.

Something about the sadness of Flamenco pulled me even after I had quit dancing.

I used to want to be Carmen Amaya, the first woman to master Flamenco steps they said only men could do. She mastered those steps to dance the stories of her people at a volume only the soul could hear.

She always wore trousers when she performed. Draped in defiance.

When the Spanish Civil War started she had to leave her home.

She kept on dancing. And saw the world.

Ten

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After.

After what happened.

After I got home from hospital.

Resumed normalcy, like the social worker told me to do. The walls of my world kept closing in on me.

Eyes followed me everywhere, whispering. As if I couldn't hear because I didn't speak.

I felt like the little girl too chubby to dance. In truth, my body was vanishing. I couldn't stomach food.

But it was really the cold sweats that got to me. I would wake shivering from airless dreams. My apartment-mate said I called out in my sleep. The words were formless. I know that because I woke myself whenever I uttered them.

The words were smoke from a fire inside.

Eleven

Flamenco came well after the fires of the Inquisition were lit to leave Spain a pure Christian nation. And yet it was created by combining musical traditions of Christians and Jews and Muslims.

It tells stories without words when words fail to speak the truth.

Flamenco music is always in a minor key.

Twelve

Grandma fled the Nazis as a little girl. She always told me when the fire of memory threatened to consume her she played piano because music silenced the flames.

But my hands. My hands were so cold, after.

Always cold.

So cold I couldn't make my fingers form the words with my flute that my heart refused to say.

I shrugged into the silence like it was a winter jacket two sizes too big.

Thirteen

My love for Flamenco unspooled into a need to know about the Jews of Spain. About their minor key lives. The Plague hit Spain in the mid-fourteenth century and diminished the entire population, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike, by nearly two-thirds.

Then came the economic despair of a country reduced. People lucky enough to have survived the Plague were dying of starvation.

Despair made way for a last grasp at faith, maybe to appease an unseeable God who hadn't spared them from devastation after all. The king and queen, desperate to restore Spain to financial health and to distract a population growing restive, commanded a holy mission to purge infidels. To get rid of those who professed the royal faith but whose blood remained tainted by the faith of their forebears.

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The king and queen captured the Alhambra from the Muslims in 1492. Sanctification by exsanguination as Jews and Muslims were slaughtered.

The king and queen said the Son of God smiled upon them.

Fourteen

Conrad, my lawyer, warned that everything about me and my past would be put on trial if I dared testify. So I really ought to stay quiet. Please could I just stay quiet.

I could see how much Conrad wanted this win. A shark in chummed water.

I chose to speak.

Fifteen

My great-grandma's brother, the one who stayed behind when she went to live a louche life in Vienna, the one who was a dissident, the one who spoke out. The one who was just too much.

He wound up at the Börgermoor labor camp, where the Nazis forced the inmates to sing. To stay cheerful, they said. To lighten their burden. To entertain the guards.

A group of prisoners composed 'The Soldiers of the Moor':

Far and wide as the eye can wander,
Heath and bog are everywhere.
Not a bird sings out to cheer us.
Oaks are standing gaunt and bare …

But for us there is no time complaining,
Winter will in time be past.
One day we shall rise rejoicing.
Homeland, dear, you're mine at last.

The Nazi guards enjoyed the song, and often sang it with the prisoners.

Sixteen

The doctor said it was something to do with serotonin and dopamine. Chemicals and emotions. Of the same substance.

I had run out of chemicals.

The doctor gave me blue pills. Urged me to be patient. To give them two months to help.

I told my dean that I was withdrawing from school.

I had to transfer. Chicago. Maybe the cold wind would breathe life back into a body depleted. I didn't choose what slammed the door shut on my before. That casual before where I took everything for granted. Freedom. Joy. Breath itself.

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Seventeen

Force a door shut, and somewhere a window opens, Grandma used to say.

I reached for the oxygen my burning lungs needed. I grasped the air and held on.

To myself. To the lizard inside, sunning itself after a kill. Content to taste the air until hunger came again.

Every step in my after would be one I chose.

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Appoggiatura

From Italian 'appoggiare', to 'lean upon'. In music, it denotes a grace note that delays the next note in the melody and expresses yearning.

Conrad

One

Sleep taunted me like the other kids whenever I was called on to read something in class and struggled to make shapeshifting letters form words. It always stayed just out of reach.

Tonight my sleepless thoughts careened from the case I was prosecuting. That awful case. Her awful story. To the past. Always to the past.

A therapist had once told me if I didn't let go of the past, I could have no future.

The triteness still chafed.

She had urged me to lightness, not understanding darkness was my penance. My demons compelled me to put other people's demons away.

To harm those who did harm.

The only way to balance the scale.

Two

I thought about the woman I had met that evening. Her body was a guitar whose smokey music called to me. Her eyes were kind, yet mournful. She sat next to me at the bar. I was grateful for that, and for the conversation. Her laughter silenced my sorrow.

We did shots of tequila. Too many. I couldn't remember whose idea it was. We went back to her place. Took everything the other could offer.

Her scent.

A white scent.

Jasmine in a night garden.

I left soon after, even though she had asked me to stay.

Mom had always smelled like jasmine.

Three

I gave up on sleep. Shuffled to the kitchen. Contemplated tea. Poured myself a whisky.

Let my mind unfurl.

That night. So many years ago.

After.

After I had touched her. The one named for the angels she resembled. Her aura, white, like the jasmine that used to bloom in our garden.

I remembered showering until the water ran cold.

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After I had gotten home from Mass.

After I had touched her.

I remembered the water cleansing my body while I touched myself to relieve an urge I didn't yet understand.

And then, I got swallowed whole by a sleep that gave me neither peace nor dreams.

Four

I couldn't make sense of the judge's ruling, no matter how many times I read the terse decision. The words were sparse and the judge cited almost no cases to support his massaging of rules of evidence.

I would request the transcript of the hearing the next day, in case I decided to pursue an interlocutory appeal. Which would probably be unsuccessful.

I wanted to shout.

By ruling the video inadmissible, the judge had handed the verdict to the defendant. I felt bad for the jury. They would never know how they had been manipulated.

The whole thing stank.

Of injustice. Of corruption. Of old family connections and old money.

The wavy aura of a migraine obscured my field of vision. I blinked, as much to clear my eyes as my mind. When that failed, I sank back into my oxblood leather armchair.

Swiped at tears that wouldn't fall.

Sipped my whisky.

Listened to the rhythmic thrum of my heartbeat.

Five

The whisky burned my throat like the shame I carried.

Shame from Father Carlyle.

Shame from what I myself had done.

Shame from all those times mom walked in while I was giving into temptation.

I would never forget her scolding me. If you touch yourself like that again, you will go to Hell.

I wondered what my punishment would be for touching my sister.

Maybe this was it. My life was the punishment.

Forever.

I succumbed to the stupor.

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Second Movement

Adagio

Italian ‘ad agio’, meaning ‘at leisure’. Indicates a slow tempo.

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Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.

Baruch Spinoza

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Nocturne

French for 'of the night'. In music, a piece evocative of night.

Rabbi José Luis Aliba

One

My first day in my new city. Chicago. I could not believe my luck. I had gotten a job as a campus rabbi. My first job after seminary. After having converted to Judaism. The religion of my heart. The religion my ancestors ran away from.

I ran to it. Let it embrace me. Felt its comfort.

But first, I had to unpack all the cardboard boxes that contained my necessities. Which turned out to be few. My books, mostly. Some clothing and dishes. Not much, but I still had to get my life in order. Mamá used to say an orderly space made room for an orderly mind.

I opened the box marked *la cocina*. Kitchen stuff. I was thankful a vase was the first thing I freed from its newspaper cocoon. I had something to put the flowers in. For Friday night. Mamá had always insisted on fresh flowers every Friday.

Two

I had always tried to be a good kid. Mamá had had enough trouble from my brothers. So I swear, I never meant to be a sticky-fingered thief. It's just that Mamá had such beautiful things hidden in her underwear drawer. So many shiny things. So many pointy things. All wrapped up in silk worn to gauze at the edges.

One thing hidden there was not wrapped in silk though. And that made me burn with curiosity. This one thing. A pendant, heavy and cold, with a bloodstone in the centre surrounded by symbols I didn't understand. This one thing? It was wrapped like a dead fish in newspaper covered in a foreign script that felt familiar even though I did not recognise it.

I knew I would get a hiding if I got caught, but I couldn't stop myself. The curiosity burned too red inside me. And the pendant called.

No. It sang to me. In a minor key.

Three

Mamá's high heels clicking down the passage woke me from my daydream. I clasped the pendant in my damp palm and did my best not to rustle the newspaper as I snaked past her wearing the look of innocence I had spent hours perfecting in front of the mirror.

Mamá bent to kiss my head and murmured her love for me. Her jasmine scent followed behind as she walked to her bedroom to change for dinner.

Friday night dinner was our family ritual.

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Four

Mamá stood at the stove stirring the *albóndigas*, the meatballs simmering in a spicy sauce that she served on Friday nights. As always, once she was satisfied that she had transformed ground beef into dinner, she turned off the flame. Turned her attention to my two younger brothers and me, all smiling beatifically and clamouring for dinner. Always so hungry, she laughed.

Papá put his arm around her waist and brushed her cheek with his lips. He put the Friday flowers into the vase on the table next to the two candles Mamá would light in a moment.

Mamá put a lace handkerchief on her head. Lit the candles. Bowed her head. I knew without knowing. Her heart uttered a prayer without words.

Five

I knew I shouldn't have taken the pendant, which at the time just seemed to be all the more reason to keep it safe. I felt sick thinking about how much trouble I would be in if it got lost. And Mamá found out. I didn't even know the word for it. For that pendant that gleamed like dried blood on a grazed knee. I couldn't let go of it. The way it singed my flesh made me feel alive.

And for the first time in my life, I felt like I didn't belong. It wasn't an uncomfortable feeling. Just an awareness. Like violin music swelling in my brain.

But as Papá thanked Jesús for the food, I felt the room narrow.

Grow darker. And darker.

I fell to the floor.

Six

I slipped into a fever dream where people in red chased with swords and fire a me that wasn't me. They tied this me that wasn't me to a stake and burned him alive for the sins of the soul. For the impure blood no ritual could cleanse. In my dream, this place was familiar even though I had never seen anything like it. This knowledge came from my bones. And was passed down from those who had lived and suffered and died long ago.

Just like I knew that this me who wasn't me was an ancestor who had studied Talmud with a man who had traded his *tzitzit* for priestly vestments to save his own skin. In this nightmare, the grandson of this former Talmud scholar wore a red hood and robe and had a wooden cross around his neck.

The hooded man kissed me once on each cheek and once on the forehead. He blessed me with the sign of the cross. Then ran me through with a rapier.

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Staccato

From Italian ‘staccare’, to separate. In music, it means notes that are separated from each other by playing them at less than their written duration.

The Man Who Had Been Born Binyamin Ha-Levi

One

I was born in 1430 in Toledo, Spain. When I was eight days old, my parents gave me the name Binyamin. Our surname was Ha-Levi, which meant we were descendants of the priestly sect. We were proud Spaniards. Proud Jews. I grew up, married Rivka from next door. We created a family. And a life.

Two

One morning. I struggled to open my swollen eyes. And to remember. I recalled men coming for me in the night. Dragging me out of bed. Out of the house. Bludgeoning my face with their halberd hands.

I remembered my family’s faces. Their wailing.

Three

Rosettes of blood stained my cheeks. My breath came in short rasps. My mouth was too dry to swallow the rising bile. I dry-heaved and strained against the shackles around my wrists and ankles. My tongue found blood crusted on my lips. I shivered cold like a corpse.

Yet, gratitude flooded my body. I thanked the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob for His protection.

And prayed it would continue.

Four

The door creaked open and torchlight knifed through the dark. I shielded my eyes.

A man in a red robe and hood loomed.

I recognised this man. My grandfather had studied Talmud with his grandfather. My grandfather talked about their famous debates about different tractates, which went on until all hours. I had loved hearing those stories as a boy, when I had just started to study Talmud. Only once did my grandfather mention, in a small voice, that this Talmud scholar who had inspired him to study more and better, had been a great friend to the family.

But Jew became Christian.

Words and water worked their miracle and forged a new man. Two generations after that change of faith, Tomás de Torquemada, the man wearing the red robe and hood before me, was born into the fire of religious purity.

Five

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Arise, the man in red had commanded.

And handed me a *Sanbenito*. I wept. The penitent's tunic adorned with a red diagonal cross meant my life was to be spared. The tunic with demons and dragons condemned its wearer to burn alive.

Leave your country and come into the land I will show you.

Renounce Satan and his evil promises. Be ye reborn in the Blood of Christ.

My mind flashed to the communal confession of the Day of Atonement. With a hand over my heart, I silently asked the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob to forgive me for sins I had committed willingly. Or under duress.

Al cheit shechatanu l'fanecha b'zadon uvishgagah.

My unwillingness to become a martyr stained my soul.

Rabbi Akiva. The Romans flayed his flesh with a comb while he recited the Shema.

But I had smelled the charred flesh. Heard the agony escape burning lips. Witnessed the pleas for mercy. For someone to end the suffering with a blade.

Six

I donned the tunic.

Knelt in front of the red robe.

Blinked away the holy water and chrism that dripped down my forehead.

Partook of the Bread of Life.

Arise, the man in red commanded. You are now Domenico de Santa María.

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Intermezzo

Italian for 'interlude'. In music, it is a short connecting piece between longer pieces.

Domenico de Santa María

One

My family and I got drunk on salvation. My son played his violin and the whole family danced and danced.

Then the time came to purge our house of anything that could identify us as Jews. The *mezuzot* came off the door frames. We tossed prayer shawls into the fire.

The Torah. That we wouldn't burn.

We buried the Torah beneath the almond tree.

But my wife insisted on keeping her grandmother's candlesticks. And when I was distracted by dance and drink, she hid an ancient amulet in her corset. She thought I hadn't seen. But I never could take my eyes off her.

I was comforted that the cold bloodstone would continue to protect our family.

Two

I needed to ensure my family's safety. So I joined the Church. Earned Her favour. Mother Church granted me a new life as a bishop.

Three

I thanked the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob for my success. And was content that when I died, my family would think of me as Binyamin, the Bishop of Blessed Memory.

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Stringendo

Italian for ‘clutching’. In music, it indicates a feeling of forward movement.

Benito Carvajal, great-grandson of Binyamin, the Bishop of Blessed Memory

One

My family. The Santa MarÍa family. We were blessed with a boundless love for the Church, for our God, and for His tortured Son. And also for the luxuries that were our earthly reward.

We were safe. Like our neighbours. With our perfumed hair, our velvet gowns, and the succulent roast pigs we feasted on every Sunday.

But, the Inquisition was a bloodhound that would not drop our scent.

Our great-grandfather, Binyamin, had sacrificed the God of his ancestors. Secured our existence by becoming Domenico. And he died a respected bishop.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

The last bars of the requiem mass were ringing in our ears when we set alight all the records that revealed our inherited taint.

Two

You see, some members of the Santa MarÍa clan changed surnames to evade detection. Other members bought purity above reproach from marriages to Old Christians. Our generosity satisfied Mother Church’s lust for gold.

We paid for a weekly Saturday mass to celebrate the Virgin Mother.

Saturdays demanded worship.

Three

Queen Isabella the Catholic, she of Law and Order, died in 1504. Her thirst for blood was something only the pageantry of flames reaching Heaven could quench. This was the legacy she bequeathed to her daughter, Juana, who continued the divine duty of purging Spain of concealed infidels.

Juana’s purge was cut short by her madness. She lived the rest of her days exiled in an abbey with only her musicians as comfort.

Four

Juana the Mad’s son Charles continued eliminating the scourge of tainted blood. He ordered Hernán Cortés to spread the word of God to the savages they discovered in the Spanish New World.

Salvation for a price.

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Their Land.
Their bodies.
Their blood.
Men and women and children alike.

Five

The safety of a strange land far away beckoned me. My great-grandfather, the Bishop of Blessed Memory, would have wanted me to be safe.

I craved playing my violin without always having to listen for the coming of the cleansing blaze.

So I posed as a sailor to join Cortés in his quest to spread the Gospel. Cortés, short of men, was grateful for another strong pair of hands.

But first, I had to say goodbye to my mother.

Six

She kissed me on each cheek.
She kissed my forehead.
She blessed me with the sign of the cross.

Then she tucked into my bag the candlesticks her mother had given her to light on Friday nights. Placed on my head a skullcap of white silk. And into my hand pressed a pendant of gold encasing a red stone, covered with symbols that she said sang to her blood.

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Dal Segno (Part I)

Italian for 'from the sign'. In music, it is denoted by a star or other sign, and tells the musicians to resume playing the piece from a different section.

The Girl

One

The end of summer in Chicago. It was all too much. Too bright, too loud. Blaring sun. Endless construction workers in their steel-toed boots and fluorescent jackets.

They were a choir with voices drowned out by the noise of their tools. Occasionally the foreman conducted them like musicians and they regrouped somewhere else on the site. The panic to finish before the first snow throbbed around them.

Jackhammers. Heels on pavement. Car horns. The groaning of trucks' brakes. The swirling of cellphones, joggers, students, professors. A miasma of nasal voices with that flat Midwestern *A*.

Flat vowels, flat landscape. Buildings that broke open the ocean of concrete.

Those buildings offered the only shade on pavement so hot the soles of my feet blistered through my sandals.

Two

Lake Michigan. A shimmering blue oasis. Respite for sunbaked eyes.

Three

I was lucky to have a family friend in the University of Chicago's admissions department.

I was lucky to have good grades.

I was lucky to get in as a transfer student.

I had been born under a lucky star, Grandma used to say.

Four

I had never felt lucky.

Five

The lake's vastness astonished me. From the shore, one saw nothing but uninterrupted blue ripples.

It supplied drinking water. And sometimes flooded, taking out expensive property at its whim.

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I couldn’t wait to see its frozen fury in winter.

Six

I found a studio apartment near campus. Something about the landlord made my skin ripple. His eyes clung to me like a wet swimsuit. Dark stubble mossed a face of indeterminate age. Whisky fumes curled out of his mouth.

I had a locksmith install a deadbolt.

But the studio was my refuge. The walls held me close and the darkness soothed me.

I could hear my thoughts. The pointy thoughts. The blue thoughts.

Like those pills I threw away.

Blue.

Like the shadows under my eyes.

It was too sticky to sleep. Hard to believe a heat as suffocating as a backdraft would soon yield to a cold that could freeze bone marrow.

Seven

My body had provided an endless supply of betrayals.

I had been a pudgy kid, and fat kids don’t dance. Not in my family.

I hit puberty early. No amount of clothing could have ever hidden enough of me.

All I had wanted to do was climb trees and play soccer with a group of hooligan boys in the neighbourhood. We had all played together since we were little. And then one day, Mother said no.

And now.

The nausea made me gasp.

Now.

Years after I had forced myself to stop being the chubby one, my pants were suddenly snug again.

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Dal Segno (Part II)

One

I left Virginia not because I wanted to.

I had to.

Still, I was looking forward to studying Arabic and Islamic Literature at U of C.

I had slammed one door, and, as Grandma used to say through a frown time had carved into her face, a window opened.

Two

The people in Chicago were hard. Sharp. Linear.

Supermodels eating cigarettes for breakfast.

The students mirrored campus buildings. Gothic to sleekly modern. They had good bones.

Like me. Grandma had always said my bones were good.

If only.

I had worked out more.

Eaten less.

Had my mother's discipline.

But I got my shape from my father, she would shrug. So really, what could I expect.

I tented myself in a floaty dress and headed to my first class. One year and I would be done.

But only if.

Three

I had always wanted to be a mom. To have a baby to love. To love me.

Before.

But not right now.

Not this way.

Four

It had to go.

It would ruin whatever I could piece together of my life.

My life.

Five

I heard the school had hired a newly-ordained rabbi. The orthodox students discovered he had grown up Catholic in Mexico. Then he figured out his ancestors in Spain had been forced to convert from Judaism to Catholicism.

Why go back to what had been centuries before? Why become a rabbi?

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I wanted to hear what he had to say, but was unconvinced that a man of God could say anything I needed to hear. He couldn't possibly understand.

Six

I got lost on the way to the hall and arrived after the opening hymn. The only seat left was between two guys who looked like fraternity brothers. I took the seat before I could think too much.

I was stuck in the middle of the row in the middle of the hall.

Between those two men in their identical chinos, blue button-down shirts, newsreader hair.

And their smirks.

Seven

The rabbi greeted the students. Having grown up Catholic, I've never been around so many Jews before, he said. Over our laughter, he smiled.

He smiled with his eyes.

Grandma had never involved her eyes when she smiled. Like it wasn't any of their business what her lips did.

The rabbi looked kind. But also like maybe he had felt flames licking his feet before.

I tried to focus on his words through the shrug in my eyes.

Eight

But beyond the identical fraternity smirks bracketing my body, which felt like it grew bigger by the moment. Beyond those identical fraternity men. In their fraternity uniforms.

The crowd. The noise. The eyes.

Everywhere I looked, everyone looked like a possible predator.

My armpits grew damp. My breath became trapped in my chest. I inflated like a balloon that needed to burst.

The walls. The walls.

They squeezed me breathless.

Nine

I had wanted to hear the closing hymn, written centuries ago in Spain.

And He is my God, my living God

But the blood whooshed in my ears.

to Him I flee in time of grief.

And I fled.

Ten

My grandmother had always said I had a soft spine. Just like my father.

But had I stayed, something bad might have happened.

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Or something worse.

Eleven

It could always be worse. That was practically in the Torah.

Twelve

I stabbed and stabbed the doorknob with the key before the door opened. I could still hear singing in my head.

But I was home.

Where I could be safe.

Alone.

Not quite.

The rising bile reminded me.

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Prelude

In music, a short introductory piece preceding a longer one.

Juanita Guadalupe Aliba

One

When I was a child, knowledge satisfied me like no food or drink. I was nothing like my brothers. They skipped school to play dominoes in the plaza. Then used their winnings to buy secret cigarettes.

All the neighbourhood kids were scared of them. So they left me alone, even though I was a nerd. Skinny. With eyeglasses a size too big.

My mother begged me to study less and to focus on being pretty. It would be such a shame if I grew up to be a spinster like my aunt, she said.

Two

My aunt was the first woman engineer in all of Monterrey. She invented a part that IBM used in its first supercomputer.

She had a private jet and travelled all over. She saw the world.

Three

But travel was for women with loose morals.

Four

My mother was a healer. She knew which herbs held which powers and how to combine them. Our friends and neighbours trusted her with their health and their secrets.

I longed to help people and science fascinated me. I would sneak biology books from the library and stay up late to read them under my blanket by torchlight. I was going to be a doctor when I grew up.

Five

Then I went from skinny to curvy. From ignored to admired. When I caught Alejandro's eye, I felt lucky for the first time. He was the most popular boy in school. All the girls wanted him. But it was me he noticed.

Six

Alejandro told me I was beautiful. No one had ever said that to me before. He looked at me in that way. That way that made me feel both excited and scared. He paid attention to me. He saw me. Actually saw me. And heard me. I could tell he found me entrancing and

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that made me feel powerful. But I said all the things I was supposed to. About good girls. About waiting. About being afraid.

He persisted. He was persuasive.

One night my resolve crumbled after we had drunk an entire bottle of wine Alejandro had pilfered from his father's cellar. The wine was fire in my throat. But that look in Alejandro's eyes made me feel like gold silk.

That look.

And his lips made me forget what good girls do. And don't do.

Seven

Three months later, we married. Six months after that, José was born.

Eight

José followed the plan we had for him. He agreed to go to seminary. But only in Toledo, Spain. To go back to our family's origins. He insisted and insisted. I could not bear for him to be so far away from me. I cried.

But in the end I relented.

Nine

I knew he had taken the amulet. I always told him his Mamá had eyes in her hands. And her back. And her heart.

I was glad when I found it in the bag he took to seminary.

He told me he kept it with him when he attended daily Mass. He said one day, he had been holding it in his hand when the priest placed the host on his tongue.

The host turned to ash in his mouth.

I think that was when I knew where fate would carry him.

Ten

Later, after he left seminary, but before he left the Church, José told me he could never sleep in the dormitory. He would close his eyes and his legs would flood with an impulse to move. He said the only way he could find peace was to pace the dormitory. Until one night, weary of the back and forth, he turned to prayer. He fingered the smooth beads of the rosary my mother had given him, and still kept losing his place, losing his words. He said they just wouldn't come. Even after he begged God to fill his heart with the right words.

A fire broke out in the dormitory, driving all the sleeping seminarians outside. He said in his panic, he took nothing but the amulet. The building was destroyed.

Fire consumed the rosary.

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Aria

Italian for ‘air’. In music, a long piece for a solo voice.

Rabbi José

One

Her anguish blew into my office like a storm, tearing me away from the sermon I was working on. I saw pain shimmering all around her as she stood in the doorway. Her jaw was set, but fragility draped her like the Virgin Mother’s blue cloak. I gestured for her to come in. I cleared my throat and tried to prepare myself to hear whatever she had come to tell me.

I had to resist the urge to call her ‘my child’.

Two

Nothing could prepare me for the story she blurted out in one breath, as if had she paused, she would have lost the will to go on. I knew she was almost daring me to judge her while also asking for permission. My hands found each other in prayer, and I knocked the tips of my fingers against my lips while I tried to shake loose something to say. Catholic doctrine was clear. But I’m Jewish, I reminded myself.

I closed my eyes and pushed away the scent of scorched flesh, a scent that had haunted me since childhood. Showed up whenever my heart beat too fast. Mamá had taken me to a neurologist when I was ten. I would never forget how her back stiffened when the doctor told her that with her keen mind and obvious interest in medicine, she should have gone to medical school.

I didn’t know then that I was the reason for the disappointment that fell across her face.

Mamá had lived what looked like a happy life with a loving husband and three adoring sons.

And yet.

Three

That day. Many years ago.

I was just a little boy. Home from school early. The front door was locked.

The front door was never locked.

Monterrey was safe.

Before the drug cartels made it a war zone.

I scratched around in the rocky front garden for the key and got coated in dust.

The instant the lock gave, I heard moaning. Some woman who was not Mamá was moaning. And Papá? He was grunting.

And calling out a name.

Over and over. And again.

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Silvia. Silvia. Silvia.

Four

I rubbed my face and made myself come back to the present. Looked at the young woman in front of me, her pallid face framed by straight black hair. Her body was huddled into the chair opposite me and barely took up half of it. She was shivering while I sat there sweating from the late summer heat.

I took a deep breath. Clutched the pencil I was holding so hard it snapped.

The odour of burning flesh curled into my nostrils.

Five

I had found in the archives of the church in Toledo documents about my long-ago ancestor and his family. A man whose parents had named him Binyamin. He had escaped death by burning when he found new life in Christ. He became a bishop. A success for the Church.

I had also learned that Binyamin's wife had been a healer. Before she too received salvation by conversion. She had been famous for her knowledge of herbs and her cleverness with concoctions. She healed infants who had croup and women with melancholy. And had a special tincture that took three nights to brew and had to be drunk at first light on the fourth day.

That tincture ended the potential life within.

Six

I said the words the woman needed to hear so she could free herself from a life she didn't want and wouldn't have. A life she told me she would end if she couldn't be free.

I saw no other choice.

I could not have another woman's blood on my hands.

Seven

That day.

I had gone into the house quiet as death, changed my clothes, and left, unnoticed. But lingered outside for a few minutes. Dazed. And wounded.

Voices raised in argument rooted me. I had watched from the street as Silvia, weeping, ran out of the front door, Papá in pursuit. Shouting at her that she couldn't keep it. It wasn't his. It wasn't his problem. I heard her threaten to tell Mamá.

My father backhanded her.

Hard.

She went flying.

Struck her head on the concrete. Dark blood pooled sticky and metallic.

I was terrified my heart was beating so loudly that Papá would hear me. I crept backwards. I could not stop looking at Silvia. I saw Papá kick her. The crunch of bones

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breaking covered me in goosebumps. Her body lay there, staring with blind eyes at the clouds.

It was all I could do to stifle the screams bubbling in my throat.
If only I had stopped him.
I crept a safe distance away and then ran.
If only I had stepped in.
I wandered in circles with unseeing eyes.
If only.
If only.
With every footstep, I heard her name.
Silvia. Silvia. Silvia.
With every footstep, I heard her end.

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Third Movement

Presto

Italian for ‘soon’. In music, it indicates a fast tempo.

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That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary.

Hillel the Elder

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Rubato

From Italian ‘rubare’, which means to rob. In music, it indicates the musician can speed up or slow down the tempo.

The Girl

One

My favourite moments when I was little were when my father got home from work. I used to pretend to be asleep on the couch so that he would tickle my neck to wake me up. I’m sure he knew I was pretending, but it was our little game.

My second favourite moments were when my father would scoop me onto his lap at the breakfast table, let me take secret sips of his coffee, and tell me stories about his family. The best stories were about his great-aunt Anna, who was a Warsaw ghetto girl during World War II.

She had grown up too poor to go to the Jewish school, so her parents sent her to the local primary school. This dent in her childhood pride became her most valuable asset because she spoke Polish without a trace of Yiddish lilting her voice.

She also had blonde curls and curves that made men look twice. She had a smile that hinted, balanced by eyes the blue of innocence.

Two

One of those breakfast stories was about how in the early days of the ghetto, Nazi soldiers were restless. There was no fighting yet, so they made their own fun.

They descended on the dense warren of families to round up men at random. Men my great-grandfather should have grown up knowing. Should have snuck smokes with behind the shul on Yom Kippur. Should have served with as pallbearers for their parents, when their time came. After they had lived a full life.

The Nazis had wartime music flowing in their veins.

They would take the men outside the walls.

Line them up.

Shoot them.

One.

By.

One.

Each shot punctuated by a wail. Of the new widow. The new orphan.

The walking dead who had no idea how much worse things would get.

Three

Anna’s trade was stealing and bartering. She pocketed trinkets and then used her flawless Polish and Aryan looks to open doors so she could sell.

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Whatever the buyers would pay for.

She split the proceeds into bribe money and food money.

Smuggled food into the ghetto. Paid the guards to look away.

With whatever the guards demanded.

Four

My great-great-aunt Anna visited us once when I was little. I remember she told me stories while we baked cookies. We were folding chocolate chips into dough that was too stiff to mix with the wooden spoon Mother used to whack me with. Anna let me mix it with my hands and didn't mind when I squished it through my fingers.

Her laughter made the bees in my head shut up for once.

It was then that she put her arm around me and squeezed me hard. As if that was the only way to burn this memory into us. A hard squeeze. Then she took my chin in her hand and looked me in the eyes.

And told me that survival requires whatever means necessary.

Five

After we put the cookies into the oven, Anna told me the story of how her brother, the one who didn't make it out of the ghetto, tried to get rid of body lice with kerosene.

The tale was so vivid, I could taste his burning flesh.

Six

She also told me the story of how, in the early days of the ghetto, she had walked into the makeshift school to volunteer. She had found a group of young adults writing and printing an underground Yiddish newspaper.

They recruited her to be a reporter.

Her first story was about how a young mother clapped her hands over her baby's mouth. So the soldiers wouldn't hear him.

The soldiers rounded up the men in all the neighbouring hovels. Stayed out of hers.

The baby never cried again.

Seven

The cookies were cooling on the rack when Anna started to tell me her most important story. Her eyes were dry. But far away like they had grown wings. She told me that each day was filled with wondering. When the next meal would be. When the next round-up would be. Who would be shot that night.

At that point, she said, food was so scarce that her skin was taut over marimba ribs. Her eyes rolled in sunken sockets and burned with fear. Her sister had escaped, but Anna would not leave her parents.

Then it happened.

She and her parents were transported to Majdanek concentration camp.

And the Nazis murdered her parents immediately upon arrival.

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Eight

But Anna was lucky.
She was moved to Auschwitz.

Nine

She used her blonde hair and dimples and innocent blue eyes to flirt with the guards as she snuck stolen gunpowder in a pouch under her dress.
She and some of her fellow inmates were going to blow up the crematorium.
Fight fire with fire, she said.

Ten

She was one of the people the Soviet army liberated from Auschwitz on the 18th of January 1945.

Eleven

Anna found freedom in Palestine in 1946.

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Accidental

The musical term for a note used in a piece outside of the key in which the piece is written.

Noor

One

My mother's mother, my Teita, which is how many Palestinian children say grandma, used to tell me stories about life before the Nakba, the Catastrophe. When Israelis came to power.

A smile would creep into her eyes as she thought back. Usually, her story would involve a fire burning somewhere in the distance, its smoke tasting of deadfall and pine needles. Punctuated with the sizzle of cooking meat. Someone was always celebrating. An engagement. The birth of a child. Possibly even a life well lived.

Back then, the hope that sprang from love provided reason enough for neighbours to gather over roasted meat, pita like pillows, and a table laden with salads, made from the produce of the neighbours' gardens.

Teita would always listen to the snatches of music carried in the hands of the wind. The smile in her eyes would fade then. And I knew. I just knew. When Teita was young, she had felt the wistfulness of one who would never be the guest of honour.

Two

Teita had grown up on a farm in the area around Ramallah. It was a peaceful area, then. Fertile, if you knew what would grow there.

Olives. Pomegranates. Grapes. These fruits were mountain goats, happy to carve out homes amongst the rocks and hills.

Teita's mother was a loving woman, according to everyone who knew her, which according to Teita, was everyone in the village. She had a heart expansive enough to include all her children. All. As well as neighbours and friends. Even her husband, whose own heart had hardened against hers.

Into young womanhood, Teita had some skin disease that doctors never identified. As the red patches encroached on her face, her own father turned away. She covered herself everywhere she was, even when she was merely tending the family's goats.

But her mother still loved her. Treated her with a kindness that cost her the love of her husband.

Three

Teita had seven sisters. Not one brother. She said all of her sisters were known for their beauty. Everyone in the village always said they would have no trouble finding

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husbands. Everyone also said that the sisters' father must have irked Allah to be burdened by so many daughters. The villagers called him Abu el Banat, 'father of daughters'.

Four

Teachers saw Teita's intellect instead of her ailment. With their encouragement, she dedicated herself to her studies. Hiding behind a scarf, she found she was capable of greatness.

Her father counted the sisters not yet married off like they were livestock.

Seven goats in the herd.

Five sisters left.

Five

Teita told me she came home from school one day, excitement buzzing under her skin. While waiting for her father to look up, she couldn't stop herself from bouncing from one foot to the other and back again.

He carried his cup of tea from the saucer to his lips with the tenderness a man reserves for a newborn baby. He sipped the scalding liquid, placed the teacup down without a sound, stirred in more sugar.

Lifted his gaze to her swaddled face.

Suppressed a shudder.

Upon hearing the news that his daughter had earned a scholarship to study medicine, her father picked up his teacup again. Blew air across the liquid and then took a tentative sip.

He smiled. Told his daughter that her sister was engaged to be married.

Six

Teita lived at home, as was the honourable thing, and attended medical school.

She watched each sister in turn find wings to fly away.

Just so they could build another gilded cage for themselves to stay in, chirping on command.

Seven

Teita's mother made her breakfast every morning. Prepared a flask of strong coffee to carry her through her day.

She stayed up until the one daughter still to live at home arrived back each night. She was always busy with something. Making pastry dough, tatting lace, reading religious texts.

Every night when Teita shut the door behind her, her mother was there with a cup of warm milk laced with honey and cardamom, an embrace, and a kiss on the forehead.

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Eight

At first, no one noticed that Teita had stopped covering her face. Had stopped attacking her skin with her nails, leaving raw angry red skin behind.

She had hidden behind the scarf for so long, that was all anyone could still see.

Nine

One morning, Teita's father was still in the house when she awoke. He was waiting for the veterinarian to come look at a pregnant goat.

She told me he glanced at her across the breakfast table. Studied her, his eyes moving back and forth as it looked like he was trying to solve a puzzle. She could tell that he had finally realised that he could see her face.

He told her it was a pity she had been so ugly for so many years. She had missed the opportunity to wed.

Ten

Teita's mother came to her graduation from medical school. Told her she was proud of her. Kissed her forehead. And then Teita saw her mother notice the man whose eyes clung to her daughter like he was memorising every feature. Invited him home to meet her husband.

Teita's father was moved to tears when he heard that this man wanted to marry his daughter.

He praised Allah when he found out how big the bride price his doctor-daughter merited.

Eleven

Family lore has it that shortly after the wedding of his last daughter, Teita's father lay in bed, paralysed by a vision.

It was said that he was sure he was not asleep when the vision danced before him. He had been awakened by the bleating of a goat outside his bedroom window. Which was curious, because the goats were shut up in the barn.

The wind must have been playing tricks on him.

It had to have been the wind.

That vision. That waking nightmare. He told everyone that he could not stop seeing it.

He had seen parcels of land like the patches of red skin that used to mar his daughter's face before they would fall off, leaving behind unsightly wounds. One by one, these parcels of land also fell away, into the hands of others.

Leaving behind his people. His culture. His community.

Twelve

Teita's father died without warning. The next day, Teita's mother sold their farm.

She told Teita that she couldn't tend the goats with hands as gnarled as an olive tree.

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She also found out she had no choice. Her husband had died indebted to an unkind man. The scion of a large and wealthy Arab family that had lived in the area for so long, some said the water of the Jordan River ran through their veins.

She took the first reasonable offer. It had come from a strange organisation. Something called the Jewish National Fund.

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A Niente

Italian for ‘to nothing’, this term indicates a diminishment in volume until the sound fades away completely.

The Girl

One

Time consists of two days: This, bright. That, gloomy.

Two

Grandma used to tell me the tales of the Arabian nights when I was a small child too tired to sleep. My favourite was the story of The Merchant and the Jinn.

I would snuggle against her, breathing in her scent. Soap mingled with cigarette smoke.

Sometimes, I saw a Jinn laughing in the corner of my room, his amorphous body sheathed in flames that did not consume him.

Three

Although I could smell his burning flesh.

Four

Mother and Grandma used to argue about everything.

Most of the time, about nothing of consequence.

The arguments resolved when both ended up laughing, punctuating the joke by jabbing the air with the glowing tip of a cigarette.

Five

When you ate the date and threw aside the stone, it struck my son upon the chest, and as fate had decreed against him, he instantly died.

The merchant’s carelessness had caused the Jinn’s fiery grief.

Six

One disagreement between Mother and Grandma had persisted throughout my childhood.

Mother had decided I would be a doctor. Strong hands, quick with mathematics, no squeamishness to speak of, I would be perfect, she said.

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Grandma had been forced to relinquish her own dreams of being a concert pianist. Yet she still saw concert halls and sparkly gowns when she closed her eyes to the noise of her past. Strong hands were made for piano, she said.

My father stood there. Yet said nothing. Shook his head. Looked at his feet.

Seven

The Thousand and One Tales existed because a sultan had loved his first wife with everything he was. Until.

Until she betrayed him. Or at least that is what he thought happened. Grandma used to shrug and say who can ever really know. It was enough that he thought it.

The sultan craved revenge against all women. So he devised a plan to marry a different virgin every night.

And behead her in the morning.

I asked Grandma what a virgin was. She shushed me and stroked my hair. But she explained what beheading meant.

Eight

When the hands of time play with us, misfortune is imparted to us by its protracted kiss.

Nine

Before blends into after without notice most of the time. Unless you have one bright day followed by gloom. Time, cracked in half.

I had no idea what to do after university.

I had already navigated an after. I had a stash of blue pills to show for my efforts.

I had forgotten that time would continue to unspool ahead of me.

Mother. You must work for a year in a clinic and then apply to medical school, she said.

My father's tender eyes tried to send me a message. Backlit by the sun, he was a Jinn being devoured by the fire of Mother.

I looked into his eyes.

He looked at his feet.

Ten

The vizier knew the sultan's appetite. Yet, he offered his daughter, Scheherazade, to be the sultan's next bride.

Eleven

I had always wanted to see the land where Jinns lit the landscape.

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Twelve

But Mother insisted I have a plan for my entire life. Without that, the moment I left would be the moment I would not be welcome back.

I looked at my father.

He looked at his feet.

Thirteen

Scheherazade had studied history and poetry. Art and philosophy. She had steeped herself in science.

Inside her head spun a kaleidoscope of tales.

Fourteen

The morning of my departure lacked fanfare. Just a sunrise, unremarkable except for the nervous bees it unleashed in my head.

The car came to take me to the airport. I tried to embrace Mother who just stood there. An uncarved block of granite.

I hugged my father. He clasped my face in his clammy palms. He looked for a moment into my eyes. He kissed my forehead right before he slipped something into my bag.

And then he looked at his feet.

Fifteen

The kaleidoscope inside Scheherazade's head entertained the sultan nightly with tales that never quite ended before he had fallen asleep.

He would awake not with thoughts of beheading, but with an ache to know the ending. This went on for one thousand and one nights.

By the time she ran out of tales to amuse the sultan, the sultan had fallen in love with her.

Sixteen

Grandma used to say luck was what saved Scheherazade's neck.

I disagreed.

Seventeen

It was her brilliance.

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A Prima Vista

Italian for ‘at first sight’. A musical term to indicate the musician is playing a piece for the first time, or sight-reading.

The Girl

One

Turbulence jolted me awake. Slammed the side of my head into the window I had propped the pillow against. I opened the shade. Looked at the blue sea hugging the desert coast.

Two

The arrivals hall swarmed with a cacophony of people in ancient robes and in modern clothing, all shouting in guttural languages while gesturing with their hands.

I elbowed my way through the horde and boarded a bus that would take me to Jerusalem.

To the home of my great-great-aunt Anna.

Three

Jerusalem stone ranges in color from beige to red or gold. It ranges from soft and malleable to very hard.

When Jews returned to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon thousands of years ago, they rebuilt the Temple. They used royal stone.

It starts out soft and easy to quarry.

Upon exposure to air, it becomes hard.

And resilient.

Four

I could hear the old city of Jerusalem before I saw it. The noise that spilled over its walls would have defeated the trumpets that felled the wall of Jericho. Car horns competed with babies’ cries. Mothers herded children while doing their daily shopping. Vendors shouted.

Shalom aleichem!

Salam aleikum!

I got off the bus at the stop my cousin had told me was nearest to Anna's apartment. I walked into a wall of smells and sounds of the market. I stopped at the first stall, and admired the rainbow of dried fruits and nuts on display. The man yelled *Shnia!*, while shaking the circle his thumb, index and middle fingers made, wanting me to wait one second, while he dealt with another customer.

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I faded into the next stall.

And then the next.

Like one possessed, I wandered. Each stall showcased different food, and I wanted nothing more than to have a stomach large enough to sample everything.

Women wore long shapeless dresses that concealed their collarbones, wrists, and knees. Their hair was covered by wigs. They shopped for that night's meal.

Just across the alley, other women wore long black robes that concealed their collarbones, wrists, and knees. They covered their hair with scarves. They also shopped for that night's meal.

Five

Finally, I arrived at Anna's apartment. When I got upstairs, she was waiting at the door.

She was a plump woman. With smile marks indenting her skin. After everything, she made sure to have abundant food and laughter. Always.

Her eyes were shining as she clasped my face in sun-leathered hands.

Shalom, habibti.

She kissed my forehead.

I always knew you would come visit me. You and I. We are the same.

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Cantabile

Italian for ‘singable’, this denotes a fluid and lyrical style of playing.

Noor

One

When I was little, Teita told me one thousand and one tales of her childhood in a beautiful and fecund Ramallah.

Before the occupation.

It sounded like a child’s idyll. A wild and rambling landscape dotted with farms and scrambling goats and clusters of houses where the neighbours loved each other as they loved themselves.

Two

Once occupied, it was a world safe for no one.

I never told Teita that the guns and checkpoints and soldiers I saw daily made her stories sound like a fevered dream.

Three

Israeli soldiers took Abu away when I was eleven. He was in handcuffs. Ankle shackles.

It was the first day I had worn the hijab. To make Abu proud.

He was convicted of participating in a plot to blow up a checkpoint. His trial drew hundreds of our people, protesting.

Even from within an Israeli prison, he insisted on his innocence.

He admitted that he had been friends with the people who strapped plastic explosives to their bodies and catapulted themselves to Paradise in millions of bloody particles.

But he said he would never have participated. Not even in the planning. He insisted he was a man of peace.

Everyone in Ramallah agreed.

Four

My music teachers always said I had a voice like the angels. From the time I was little, I spent my days singing.

Teita had wanted me to become a paediatrician.

Mama had had dreams of being a dancer, but she married Abu. And her hopes died.

Five

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Mama always told me I had been a striking child. Sinewy. I could move as fluidly as a column of smoke. Mama had new hopes.

Six

Abu's uncle had been a freedom fighter. A member of Black September, a group founded in 1971 as retribution for the Jordanian troops' show of force when the Palestinian Liberation Organization attempted to seize power from King Hussein of Jordan.

Black September's original mission had been to assassinate King Hussein.

Seven

The 1972 Munich Olympic games were meant to be the counterpoint to the 1936 Berlin games that Hitler hijacked for his propaganda campaign.

Eight

They were also meant to be the counterpoint to the 1968 Mexico City games. Just days before the opening ceremony, hundreds of students gathered in the Plaza of the Three Cultures.

The gathering was peaceful.

Nine

The Plaza celebrated pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, and post-independence cultures.

The Mexican army opened fire on the unarmed students. And killed hundreds.

The soldiers then lurked like malevolent Jinns throughout the games.

Ten

By 1972, the world was ready for what Munich had dubbed *Die Heiteren Spiele.* The Cheerful Games.

Eleven

When I was twelve, I auditioned for a role in my school's production of *Aladdin*. I was cast in the lead female role. Princess Jasmine.

I couldn't believe my luck. I always knew I had been born under a lucky star.

I was so elated, I floated all the way home to tell Mama.

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Twelve

But Abu would not permit his only daughter to perform in front of people who were not family. In front of men.

Thirteen

On the fifth of September 1972, members of Black September infiltrated the Munich Olympic Village. They had a map of the village apartments. Skipped the sharpshooters and attacked wrestlers instead.

They murdered two Israeli athletes and held nine others hostage.

The hostages and a West German police officer died during the rescue attempt.

The International Olympic Committee chairman insisted the Games must go on.

Fourteen

Abu captivated people with his gaze, and with the almost-smile he always wore. He looked at people as if they were the only ones who mattered, even if they were merely handing him tea.

Mama said that when she met him, he had a mischief in his eyes she could not resist. And an authoritarian heart. Mama mistook control for protectiveness. And love.

By the time I was a teenager, mama's shoulders were stuck in a frown. When Abu was taken away, mama could choreograph her own life. She stood taller. Smiled. Even sang a bit with me. I had been determined to become a famous singer. I tried to teach my mother how to harmonise, but the angels who look after tuneful things had forgotten to give her a golden ear.

Fifteen

Abu had a network of friends who spied on us. The day my boyfriend and I went to a music festival, where I also performed, my father had men in place.

Just in case.

But singing was not my worst offence that day.

The spies saw me hold my boyfriend's hand.

Sixteen

Mama wore her smile like a dancer's costume. It fit, but she could cast it off if she needed to.

She never stopped looking over her shoulder. She knew her husband's imprisonment did not mean she was beyond his reach.

Seventeen

When I got home from the festival, mama was in a panic. She had her own network of friends.

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She knew I was in trouble.

Eighteen

I tried to deny, protest, find a way to stay.

Mama shook her head. Insisted this was best.

She gave me a bag she had kept ready. Just in case. She handed me a scrap of paper with an address scribbled on it.

She cradled my face in her hands. Kissed my forehead. Slipped something in the bag. Pushed me out the door. To safety.

From my father.

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Con Grazia

Italian 'with grace', denotes a fluidity to playing.

The Girl

One

Every family has stories that are told and retold and told again. Changing with each retelling. But the heart remains the same. This story is one my father told me so often, I felt like I had been there.

Two

My great-great-aunt Anna's parents threw Anna's little brother, Yankl, the one who made it out of the ghetto, from a window of the train that was transporting them to Majdanek. Anna and her parents watched his small body hit the gravel like a sack of potatoes and roll away.

Three

The angels who look after flying things smiled on Yankl that day.

Four

Without those angels, I would not be here.

Five

Anna was separated from her parents when they arrived at the camp. And at the same time, the angels who look after little things made sure Yankl was found. By a Lithuanian family trekking through the forest. They had been walking for weeks. Exhausted and thirsty, the mother almost tripped over the boy.

She thought he was dead. He awoke as she searched his pockets.

His wrist bones stuck out through the skin.

And yet. He grasped her hand with the ferocity of life burning to live. Her husband hissed about certain death. But she could not leave the boy behind.

Six

They were now a family of five. They walked on and on and on. Until they could walk no more. And then they continued.

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Finally, they found a truck driver willing to spirit human cargo to a ship destined for South Africa, where the mother's cousins had been living in peace for decades.

Seven

My great-grandpa's adoptive family made Cape Town their home. They provided for him as if he were their own. They made sure he had everything he needed. As much as his new brother and sister. They made sure he felt just as loved. My father told me that all the time. As if to emphasise love had been abundant at one time.

My great-grandpa had friends of all colours. In spite of the law. He went to prison for bringing an African friend into a petrol station shop to get food for their roadtrip. Both men were beaten before they were imprisoned. My great-grandpa's sentence was shorter.

Not long after his release, my great-grandpa and his family emigrated to Israel. As disgusted as he was by the apartheid regime's policies, he was more rattled by the swift police enforcement.

Eight

But that was not the real reason he left.

Nine

The day my great-grandpa was released, a neighbour had put a sign on his front gate.

Ten

A yellow star with the word *Jude* emblazoned on it.

Eleven

My great-grandpa was reunited with his sister Anna in Israel. They were the only ones in their family to have survived. And they, and their families, thrived there.

Anna loved my great-grandpa's grandson, Eitan. The man who years later became my father. He would come round after school for snacks and a chat. She used to help him with his homework. He would run after his much older cousins, trying to imitate them, usually walking back, shoulders slumped, to Anna's apartment after his cousins lost him in a maze of alleys.

Every time he visited Anna, my father couldn't help himself. He always found something small to take home with him. Every time he told me that, I could see his eyes gleaming with mischief.

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Twelve

My father left Israel to attend university in the United States. He told me he packed light because he really hadn't grown up with much. He took some clothing. Less clothing than he really needed because he chose to make room for as many books as he could fit. He also made sure to include his favourite thing he had stolen from his great-aunt Anna. But no matter how much I begged, he would never tell me what that thing was. He said it was a secret. Between him and Anna.

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Mordent

From Latin ‘mordere’, ‘to bite’. It indicates a single, rapid alternation with the note above or below the written note.

The Girl

One

Exhilarated from the journey, I found myself across from my great-great-aunt Anna. At a table laden with stuffed grape leaves, hummus, pita like pillows. Her blue eyes threatened to swallow me.

I had a pang of regret that I could never know anyone else from that generation of my father’s family.

I insisted on speaking Hebrew. I needed to practice. Anna wanted to make life easier for me. We met in some mangled hybrid middle.

I found myself breaking open. Just a little piece. And then another. As I broke, I felt more relief than the blue pills ever gave me. Her eyes made me want to tell her everything.

Two

Tell me, Anna said. Did your father give you anything for me? Did you know he was a sticky-fingered thief as a boy, she added, laughing the rasp of an old lady smoker.

Three

It was then I realised my father had slipped something for Anna, and not for me, into my bag. I plucked out a small box. She opened it. Threw her head back and laughed. A braying, cigarette-roughened, full-throated laugh that left her gasping.

Four

Inside was a cigarette lighter embossed with a swastika.

Five

The swastika, with its interlocking squared-off double-S, was an ancient Hindu symbol of divinity and good luck.

Then the Nazis took it. And drained it of its original meaning.

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Six

I asked Anna what was so funny about a Nazi lighter. She said it was how the lighter came to be hers that was so funny. It was the first thing she had ever stolen from a guard.

One morning, as she was waiting to pass through the guard station on her way out of the ghetto to scrounge for food, she undid an extra couple of buttons on her blouse.

She figured why not. Every day was probably her last. Maybe part of her wanted to get shot right then. Just to get it over with. She shrugged. Took a drag of her cigarette.

Her eyes lost their smile. Like someone had switched off a light. While the guard stared at the blush creeping across her bare chest, she had grazed his trousers with her hand. Felt the power she had over him. Emboldened, she reached into his pocket and grabbed the lighter. Walked away with her spine straight.

But braced for the blow.

By this point, she had learned to always, always, always brace for the blow.

Seven

Anna asked me if the women's centre where I would be interning was for Jews, or for all women.

I told her Palestinian women had founded it, but that it was for everyone.

Her eyes narrowed. And then melted into a smile.

Eight

I wanted to know why she never remarried after her husband died. She sighed and told me that years ago, she had had an affair with a Palestinian. She had moved through her grief, but still felt lonely. His wife had also died years before. He taught Middle Eastern literature somewhere in the UK and was spending his sabbatical in Israel. He was handsome. Dark. Dangerous. They delighted in each other's company, and in the comfort each other's body offered.

After several months, it was time for him to go back. And he wanted Anna to go with him.

She who had planned to blow up Auschwitz's crematoria with stolen gunpowder, setting it alight with a stolen Nazi cigarette lighter, could not face her community's judgment.

So she broke it off with him.

Nine

Every day, I wrote down the stories Anna told. She insisted nothing she had done was out of the ordinary for someone whose life could have ended at any moment.

She saw what she did as merely necessary for survival.

I saw it as brilliance.

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Harmony

Greek for ‘fit together’, used in music to refer to two or more notes from a chord played simultaneously.

The Girl and Noor

One

A woman about my age with dark hair and a pale face swaddled by a hijab ran breathless into the women’s centre where I was sitting at the reception desk. She started weeping and raging in an Arabic so fast and erratic that I could not hold onto her words.

But I felt her terror.

Two

The young man with her held her hand and looked at his feet and shifted his weight left to right while his lips moved in silent supplication.

He looked like a Jewish man deep in prayer.

Three

One of the founders of the centre bundled the woman into a conference room encased in glass. As she did with every meeting, she closed the blinds.

She told me to fetch a glass of water and then to come back to observe.

Four

The woman said her name was Noor. And that her father wanted to kill her because she had held her boyfriend’s hand and dared to sing in public. She glanced at our faces to judge the enormity of the moment.

Five

Orthodox Jews feel a woman’s singing voice has a siren’s pull and can rip holes in a man’s spirituality. So Orthodox Jewish women are forbidden to sing in public.

Six

Orthodox Jewish men face no such prohibition.

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Seven

Noor clasped my hands after I set the glass of water down in front of her. She wanted to tell me her story, she said in a mixture of Arabic and English.

I looked at my supervisor and she nodded.

The story gushed like a waterfall while I held onto Noor's cold hands as tightly as I could. So I wouldn't drown.

I promised her I would help keep her safe. I looked at my supervisor, who nodded again.

Eight

We decided on a safe house in a Bedouin community in the Negev where we thought her father would never look. We asked our same faceless God to guide and protect her.

Nine

She dug through her bag, saying her mother had tucked something inside. She pulled out a gold chain with a *hamsa* on it. She mumbled a prayer and put God's hand around her neck.

Ten

As she was leaving, Noor stopped. Turned around. Locked eyes with me.

And told me that her name means light.

Eleven

I told her my name means joy.

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Coda

Italian for 'tail'. In music, it indicates a concluding section.

Reflective Essay

Writing *The Sound of the Unseen* was reminiscent of my days as a trapezist. Moments of elation similar in feel to the single instant of weightlessness at the apex of a swing have been followed by crashes that, even with a net to catch me, have been painful. When I decided to fuse my love for music with my passion for writing, I was naive to how difficult the project would be occasionally. But just like with trapeze, I've flipped myself off the net, climbed back up the ladder and jumped again. And again. The moments of exhilaration are worth smashing myself into the net sometimes.

The obvious question is why would I combine musical terminology and structure with story. The answer embodies the hybridity with which I embrace the world, since I myself am a hybrid as an American who has lived abroad for nearly fifteen years.

While developing this story, I realised that I associate almost everything I do with music, either turning to it for inspiration, or seeking the lyricism of the right word. I am a classically trained musician, and the rhythm and precision of that discipline have coloured other creative aspects of my life.

Story and music are linked. The rhythm and pace of a story evoke musicality, and when I'm interpreting a piece of music I am playing, I invariably turn to story. I imagine what the composer was trying to convey while trying to shape musical passages into separate, but interdependent phrases. I create a scene that fits the music's mood, and I use that to give the piece the right shading, or tonal qualities, or emphasis, or any of the innumerable qualities that go into playing music. Or crafting a story.

At first, the conceit of trying to fit musical terms to story seemed gimmicky. I saw quickly, however, that it flowed into the very backbone of the story. Music is culturally significant and unique. In a story about displacement and oppression, music became an important thread binding fragments into a whole.

It mirrors intersectionality. As a white Jewish American woman, I have a highly specific and personal view into oppression and generational trauma. I would never speak to any other minority's experience with oppression, however. What I hope to do here is to call attention to the ubiquity of the experience. Music is a cultural commonality -- we all identify culturally with some form of music, and the type of music can identify us in our smaller

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groups. We are all also interlinked, whether by a shared culture or just because we share space. What we do affects others. What they do affects us.

It is a cliché that if a character travels back in time, he or she worries about how the smallest thing he or she does can alter the future. Yet, no one in the present embraces this expansive ability to alter the future, hopefully for the better, with even the smallest act. This creative thesis explores not just how intergenerational trauma or heinous actions affect people, but how the small can be great. And how, ultimately, people can experience redemption by helping to lift up their fellows, with even the smallest gesture.

Music naturally focuses on the small things. Each piece is divided into bars, which are further subdivided into beats, which can be further subdivided. Music is granularity, so it made sense to me to marry two seemingly disparate art forms to emphasise how the great comprises the small. Furthermore, using musical terminology as chapter titles was a natural extension of how I see music and story as inseparable. Music also has a rich assortment of terms to assist the composer in conveying to the musician what mood or colour or story to evoke. Musicianship is not just knowing how to play the notes and keep time; it involves infusing the music with artistic interpretation, in part guided by the terms the composer or editor used. These terms harmonised perfectly with invoking either a mood or style for each chapter in this thesis.

In terms of my process, the first thing I did was to reflect on issues that bother me, that I could address using a story. Part of my experiences of being a woman, and an expat who has had the privilege of living in several countries, are the issues of displacement and oppression. I am accustomed to not feeling at home. Or to being consciously, or self-consciously, aware of being a guest. And I am equally used to not feeling at home in my own body. In this post-#MeToo moment, it should not come as a surprise that women sometimes feel their body is a liability. Too skinny, too fat, too this or that, too vulnerable. I decided to explore these themes of not belonging and of erasure of self in a work of fiction.

Once I identified the broad topic, I deliberately became curious. I switched from the typical adult ‘spotlight consciousness’, an ability to focus on one task while blocking out all distractions, to a more childlike ‘lantern consciousness’, which entails pulling back one’s focus to a wide perspective to take in all available information, without filtering out anything. A distraction might spark inspiration.

At the very beginning of working on this project, Professor Moolman asked me to write something about learning to play a musical instrument. I spent several days ruminating about learning to play the flute, an instrument I have studied since I was eight. I got so

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involved in thinking about the mechanics of learning music that I worried I was going to write some horrid how-to manual about literally learning to play a musical instrument.

And then I pulled back my focus to let in all the distractions. At that moment, Britney Spears was the subject of a documentary. And that turned out to be the spark I needed. She had been sexualised as a young girl, and essentialised as being worth only the pleasure her appearance provided, ostensibly to men. Her immense vocal talent was secondary to the fact she was a pretty girl.

Regardless of how one might feel about her music, Britney Spears is an objectively talented singer and performer and is, as we all are, worth more than how much she deserves the male gaze. I related to her experiences of being reduced to nothing more than pleasing appearance and behaviour. No one ever purposely essentialised me. But that is precisely the point. It is so ingrained in society to diminish girls -- to oppress them while also repressing them lest they be *too much* -- that I hold almost no one responsible for having done the same to me. For the sake of fairness and balance, as well as to enrich the stories I wanted to tell, I also reflected on how these same toxic elements of society negatively impact boys and men by reducing them to a random definition of essential maleness against which they are measured, and most often, found lacking. These became central themes.

This spark kindled a piece that had nothing to do with learning to play a musical instrument. Instead, it explored themes that grew into threads that run throughout the work as a whole. In that first piece, I found not just the main character, The Girl, but also the tone and style I would continue throughout. The Girl is very matter-of-fact, almost detached. The style is deliberately fragmented and disjointed timeline-wise to impart a sense of discomfort that mirrors the sense of displacement The Girl, and characters in each section, have each experienced.

Two other sparks of inspiration stand out in my memory. The first happened when I was listening to J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerti* sometime toward the beginning of this project. The word Brandenburg circled around my brain, and then I connected it to the fact Bach had lived in Weimar, which led to the connection that the Weimar republic ceded power to the Nazis, who marched through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin when they took over. This happened quickly. I undertook the research, however, both thoughtfully and thoroughly. And slowly. The second spark that still stands out is when Professor Moolman told me he was attending an online conference at the University of Toledo. I joked that I hoped it was Toledo, Spain rather than Toledo, Ohio (it was not), and that made me think of the Spanish Inquisition, and then I was off on another research tangent that produced the second section of my thesis.

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Many authors influenced me during this project. Rachel Cusk's novel, *Outline* (2016), impacted me in terms of how she used the narrator's relationship with each character to tell the character's story, relegating the narrator's story to the background. The narrator is key not just to tell the reader what is happening, but to give voice to the other characters. In that way, The Girl's story elicits the other characters' stories. The facet of Cusk's narrator I related to most was the fact she was a nondescript middle-aged woman. The march to senescence certainly brings up fears of mortality, but for many women, the primary fear is that of erasure.

Shubnum Khan's short story, *Waiting for the Moringa Tree to Flower* (2021), inspired me to use numbered sections to separate seemingly disparate, yet related, vignettes. The tone also inspired me to approach topics obliquely. And to allow the reader to discover the extraordinary in the otherwise uneventful.

Using a fragmented style let me play with rhythm and flow as well as temporal discontinuity. It also gave me the freedom to weave a more poetic use of language throughout the prose piece. And I could also make the writing sensorial by dropping cues that are threaded throughout, like fire or the scent of burning flesh, or cooking smells, or the scent of jasmine.

In the opening piece, *Da Capo al Coda*, I describe a piano bench covered with 'Demons and dragons. Flickering flames and shades of bruises'. Those images are intended to produce a visceral reaction similar to how the characters feel when smelling burning flesh. It is a way to create empathy between reader and characters. The sensorial threads throughout the work also create continuity out of stories that, on their surface, might seem unrelated.

Olga Tocarczuk, in her novel *Flights* (2018), ties together the entire narrative with descriptions of human tissue preserved centuries ago and human bodies preserved through the modern method of plastination. She did a tremendous amount of research, both historical and methodological, and yet, she tucked these gruesome tidbits into her story in the most artful way. This inspired me to incorporate my penchant for history throughout the story, but to cover my tracks sufficiently that it would not read like a research paper.

I was particularly drawn to the spare language of Sam Shepard's short stories in his collection *Great Dream of Heaven* (2003). Not only did his language influence me, but also the way he jumps into the middle of a scene and assumes the reader will catch up. This also reminded me of Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* (2009). The viewer has a sense of parachuting into the middle of a take and leaving shortly thereafter, possibly before the

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scene is even finished. This pacing not only keeps everything fresh, but also allows for plenty of blanks to be filled in by the reader/viewer.

In *Stringendo*, a distant ancestor of a main character is telling his story of sailing to the New World with Hernán Cortés. This character mentions that they would be bringing the Gospel to savages, who would then earn '[s]alvation for a price. / Their Land. / Their bodies. / Their blood. / Men and women and children alike'. I saw no need to create extraneous narrative to convey the horrors of colonialism. It made sense instead to leave plenty of space, both literal on the page and figurative, to let the reader fill in those blanks.

A major question I explore is the duty of care we owe others. Maybe it extends only to refraining from overtly hurting others, something which several of my background characters have failed to do. Maybe it extends to actively helping others, something which the main characters do, both because of and in spite of their histories of trauma. I have depicted the effects of trauma as contagious. The science on the heritability of traumatic changes to DNA is not settled. However, trauma changes people's behaviour and the effects of that trickle down through the generations.

I also sought to explore how helping others could enable a person to obtain healing through a renewed identity. I aimed to show that people are the product not just of what happens to them, but also of what they choose to do afterwards. Wrestling with demons of the past and not succumbing to them is what humanises these characters. They rise above circumstance, and in so doing, they become self-actualised. It is as if they existed without identity before they were able to surmount their difficulties, and the surmounting is what birthed them anew. In fact, the main character remains nameless until after she has had her turn to rise above her circumstances and to help another character. Therein lies the hope of redemption.

This thesis is a sonata of words. A sonata is a musical form typically in three movements, with a couple of dominant themes that are introduced, explored, and recapitulated. But that was not how I initially envisioned it. In fact, I tried to make the second piece, in all its brevity, fit into sonata form. It did not work, primarily because exploring an idea with words takes longer than exploring a musical theme, and I had not allowed enough space for the story to breathe. What I had tried to cram into a few pages evolved into several pieces, with fully realised characters.

Allowing space to develop characters also allowed space to add in what might appear to be historical non sequiturs, but actually are germane to the background of the character in that particular piece. For example, in *Fugue*, part of Conrad's background is that his mother, Marjorie, had a tainted past and got married for the sake of being married. His

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mother was a troubled woman. In a stand-alone section of that piece, I mention that ‘In 1962, György Ligeti wrote ‘Poème symphonique’, a cacophony of one hundred metronomes set to different speeds. / The fireworks of sound drove away the bees in Marjorie’s head’.

This is not actually as random a bit of information as it might initially seem. It’s a bizarre historical fact that illustrates how Marjorie sought comfort, that she was interested in music, and that she had troubled thoughts. It was a fact I stumbled upon while listening to a music podcast with my children. I found it interesting, so I made a note of it and read about it later. In *Fugue*, I also discuss parts of the Vietnam War. Conrad’s father was a veteran, and also a troubled man. I talk about a bridge American soldiers took seven years to destroy, but I mention that it was also the place where a lot of children drowned. I end that section with the observation, ‘To this day, Vietnamese parents tell their children tales of the *ma da*, spirits of the drowned, who haunt lakes and rivers.’ I end the piece itself with a description that in his dreams, Conrad ‘saw the bloated bodies of the drowned, eyes pleading for help’.

Much of what the characters have experienced is brutal. While writing, I often felt like I was pulling words one by one from my brain with the finest of tweezers. Delicacy was the tool I chose to heighten the brutality. For example, in *Forte*, the narrator describes her rape. I used a lot of space on the page, not just to slow down the pace, but to highlight the horror of what she describes. First, she describes being followed and grabbed by a man who ‘[t]hrew me down like I would bounce’. Second, in a separate section, she details that ‘[b]reath after breath after breath, he thrusted into me. / It felt like forever’. Then, in another separate section, she just says, ‘And more’.

That is another way music has found its way into this project. I used the negative space on the page to convey as much of a message as the written words do. Negative space functions like a rest in music. Disorganised sounds make noise. To become music, sounds must be organised and interspersed with silence. Musical phrases must contrast. There must be loud passages, and quiet. Fast and slow. Lengthy and brief. I have arranged many of my pieces to be as much about the visual as they are about the textual. The visual arrangement of words on a page is analogous in my mind to the sounds and silences that elevate music from the realm of noise.

Similarly, the white space on a page gives the reader a break. It provides emphasis without shouting. And it serves as a call to action for the reader to participate. Fill in the blanks, literal and figurative. I believe that a reader must feel engaged and invested in the story in order for the story’s themes to have impact.

I also believe that art should not merely please its audience. It should provoke. It should be timely, which is why I have always thought the study of literature could provide as

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much information as the study of history. In fact, this body of work represents hundreds of hours of research into history, economics, psychology, and musicology. Its very hybridity -- of poetic language and prose form as well as of writing and music -- is meant to be a link not just between music and storytelling, but between the reader and those whose voices must be silenced no more.

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