



Weintraub, Mietek. *The Arrival: I Sought God in Hell*. CreateSpace, 2012.

[pp. 18-19]

The third decision was the one on which we had resolved three days ago: hiding! Still it was very risky. First, we had no food or hope of finding any in the nearly empty ghetto, and we were very, very hungry. Second, disregarding German orders to show up for deportation was very dangerous: if discovered, we could be shot on the spot. And yet we still tried hiding. [...]

To lure us out of hiding, the Germans promised bread and marmalade to anyone who showed up for the final transport, and they assured us that Rumkowski, would also share our ride out of the ghetto. In earlier years, when they needed workers outside the ghetto and enticed us with promises of more food and decent living conditions, volunteers were reluctant to go because they didn't trust deceptive Nazi promises, which kept us forever off balance and making the wrong decisions. But in the company of our King, they surely wouldn't try to deceive us!

Still, our decision to go voluntarily was marred by a bad omen: Mama shattered a mirror while packing last night. She stood over the splinters mortified with foreboding. I was sickened with grief, watching her, but with the threat of getting shot outright, what could I say to cheer her? What choice did we really have?

[pp. 80-82]

"Surrender your children."

"I have to cut off a limb to save the body."

"Give me the sick! In their place, I can salvage the healthy."

"Do you want the whole population to be annihilated?"

Rumek's [Rumkowski's] impassioned speeches in September of 1942 began our most traumatic period in the ghetto, which ended with the Dreadful Selection and the ultimate banishment of sixteen thousand people and the worst mourning time for those whose close relatives were taken away and sent into the unknown.

"We don't feed useless mouths," claimed the Germans, asking for the surrender of twenty-five thousand "unproductive" Jews for deportation, including children under ten, the elderly and the sick. It was a horrid order when Rumek commanded all parents to turn over their little children or else the Germans would deport the parents along with them. He spoke in the streets, coaxing, urging, pleading, reminding us that a German order is irrevocable and tried to console us that he had bargained with them and brought their original demand for twenty-five thousand down to only twenty thousand. People cried and prayed, summoning God to witness such an atrocity, bewailing that even the Pharaoh's edict to slay



all the Jewish first-born males was benign compared to the Hitlerites' demand to "surrender" *all* little children. Even our Almighty reacted to this ghastly edict by instructing Moses to foil Pharaoh's plan, which resulted in the death of the Pharaoh's own first-born son.

The quota was not met and the Germans promptly took over. They declared a *Sperre* (blockade) in which they themselves would weed out the "undesirable elements". This meant the most brutal of actions. SELECTION, the most dreaded word in the ghetto, indicated family break-ups, the tearing away of little children from their mothers' breasts, of elderly parents from their already grown children, evictions of all hospital patients, and the culling of any frail-looking people. With cordons of soldiers and the Jewish Ghetto Police, they sealed off the ghetto block by block. It was a week of pandemonium and extreme heart-wrenching scenes. We weren't told where the deportees were sent. We tried to believe German assurances they were being sent to a special camp for lighter work, although we expected the worst. If the Hitlerites treated us, able-bodied and productive workers with the utmost harshness and extremely reduced food supply, how would they treat these fragile souls in need of even more tender care than we did?

"Mothers and fathers, give your children up, and I promise you'll live. We must cut off one arm to save the whole body of our people," Rumek kept on urging. That was easy for him to say; he was in his late sixties and never had any children. But even if he did, he'd be exempt from surrendering them, as many of the privileged were. He, the "Champion of the Children" had created an orphanage just two years earlier, and cleared the ghetto streets of homeless, barefoot and half-clad waifs trembling in the cold, often swollen from hunger, whining, begging, lamenting, and singing to tug at the hearts of wretched passers-by. And yet, he had ultimately surrendered these rescued orphans to their uncertain fate. We couldn't believe it!

That infamous selection killed the very soul of the Lodz Ghetto Jews. Parents were faced with an agonizing decision—a veritable Judgement Day—if they surrender their little children for deportation, they'll have to live out the rest of their lives feeling like accomplices; if they join their little tots, they'll abandon their older children, reducing their chances to survive. The parents who tried to join their kidnapped tots were brutally torn away from them and forced back.

Some parents remained in their apartments instead of coming to the assembly with their little ones. Some hid their tots under beds, in closets, and behind fake walls, but the Hitlerites, assisted by the Jewish Ghetto Police, came up and searched every apartment, even climbing the highest floors, dragged out the hidden kids and wrested the tots away from their parents. Children screamed in terror as their parents struggled with those who tried to take them away. Some parents chased the trucks into which their children had been tossed, but the Germans shooed them away or even shot them dead. They often shot the resisters or even tossed their little ones out the windows from the upper floors, killing them instantly.

These horror stories reached us in the first two days of the Selection even though we were strictly confined to our building at 38 Zgierska Street, the ghetto's largest tenement complex. One the third day,



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
& EDUCATION CENTER

it was our turn to be selected. With an ominous foreboding and trembling in fear, we went down to the courtyard. Older by five years than the limit of ten, I still worried that the Germans would find me too emaciated. I didn't want to part with Mama who, I knew, wouldn't let me go without a struggle and fight like a tigress for her only cub.

The image of Selection is still so vivid to me that it is as if it were happening right now. The shouting of the Jewish police; the hubbub of the assembling people was suddenly hushed after a piercing scream: "*Achtung!*" to stand at attention. A dead silence fell on all people assembled in rows as we looked to our left. A tall SS officer, in a black uniform and shiny black riding boots, entered to review us. Some Jewish policemen followed him, and gathered the unlucky ones whom he pointed out; they immediately escorted them to the rear of our huge courtyard where trucks were waiting. Those who "passed" the Selection were quickly dispatched to our building's huge entrance-gate. The officer strutted briskly, pointing at people to step out of their row. When he came near me, I drew myself up to attention, looked straight ahead in military fashion. I avoided eye contact for fear of provoking him, yet saw his pale face twisted in a scowl. He promptly strutted past Mama and me, and we were immediately ordered to join the lucky ones filing in the gate. Once inside, Mama and I hugged each other gratefully: We PASSED! We thought we may yet live to see the end of such abominations!