



Story from the book 'The Seven God Years', by Etgar Keret

Jam

The Waiter from the cafe in Warsaw asks me if I am tourist. "Actually, my home is right there" pointing with my finger at the nearby crossing. Surprisingly, a short period of time has passed for me to call a place wide only a hundred and twenty centimeters, in a country whose language I do not speak 'home', but the wide, long room where I stayed the night feels like home.

Three years ago, the idea felt like a foolish joke. Someone called me from an unknown number. On the other side of the call was a man who spoke English with a pronounced polish accent and who introduced him-self as Mr. Jakub Szczesny, an architect.

"One day I was walking on Chlodna Street and I noticed a narrow split between two buildings. That split told me that I needed to build a house for you right there" he said.

"Great, it's always good to listen to a split" I said.

Just after two weeks from the weird conversation which I classify as a 'nebulous joke', I got a call from Szczesny again. Except this time, he called from Tel Aviv. He came here so we could meet face to face, because he believes (he thought well) that during our previous conversation I didn't take him seriously. We agreed to meet at a café in Ben Yelhudan' Street, where he clarified details about his idea of building a house in my proportions; the more minimalistic and the less, the better. When Szczesny looked at the unused space between the two buildings in Chlodna Street, he decided to build a house there just for me. He also showed me a blueprint of his idea, which was a narrow three story house.

After our meeting I brought the computer stimulation of the future house to my parents. My mom was born in Warsaw in 1934. When the war started, my whole family ended up in the ghetto. As a child I had to take care of providing food for my parents and my little brother. The children from the ghetto could escape much easier and return with stolen food. Unfortunately, she lost her mother and little brother in the war and after that her dad passed away.

Many years ago she told me that after her mom's death, she told her father that she cannot fight anymore, and that she doesn't mind how she will die. Her father told her that she cannot let herself die just like that, she is the one who has to live. "The Nazi Party wants



to erase our name from the earth, and you are the only one who can keep it still alive. You need to survive the war and secure that our name still lives so that anyone who walks through Warsaw knows for the name.” Shortly after that he died too, during the Warsaw uprising. At the end of the war, they sent my mom to a Polish orphanage, then to another orphanage in France and after, to Israel. Surviving all that, she was able to fulfil the request of her father.

She kept the family alive, and family’s name.

When my books started to be published in different languages, the two countries in which I had most success were, to my big surprise, Poland and Germany, after that following my mom’s biography, came France. My mom never came back to Poland, but my success in Poland was very important to her, even more important than my success in Israel. I remember, after she read my first collection of stories in Polish, she said “ you are not an Israeli writer, but a Polish one in exile.”

She just took a quick look of the blueprint of the house. To my surprise, she recognized the street that very second, the narrow house would be built right where the bridge connected the small part of the ghetto to the larger part. When she smuggled food, which is where she had to bypass the barricade that was looked by the Nazi army. She knew they would kill her on the spot if they caught her carrying a loaf of bread.

Now, here I am on the same spot, where the house is not just a simulation. There is a bell, and right next to it there is an inscription with bold letters saying HOUSE OF KERET. With this, I now feel that my mom and I fulfilled grandpas wish and that our name is alive in a city where nothing of us is left.

Returning back from the café, a woman standing at the entrance holding a jar, older than my mom, was waiting for me. She lives across the road, and she heard about the narrow house and wanted to welcome her new Israeli neighbor by giving her homemade jam. I thanked her and said that I won’t stay long here, it’s more symbolic. She nodded but I noticed she wasn’t listening to what I was saying. I asked someone passing by to translate what I was saying, but he said that he doesn’t think she hears well. I thanked her once more and went back to the house. However, she caught me for my forearm and started her monologue. The guy I asked to translate hardly kept up with what she was saying. “When she was a little girl, she said, I had two friends from class who lived not far from here. They were both Jews and when the Germans took over, they had to move to the ghetto. Before they left, my mom gave me two slices of bread with jam, and told me to



give them to my friends. They took the two slices of bread with jam and thanked me after which I never saw them again.”

The old lady nods as she confirms every word translated to English, and when the man who translated went silent, she added another few sentences. “This is the same type of jam that my mother spread on those slices of bread, but now, it’s a different era, and I hope that nobody will force you to leave your home.” The old lady nodded and her eyes went watery. I hugged her, and at first it scared her for a bit, but then she was very happy.

That same night I was sitting in the kitchen of my narrow house drinking a cup of tea, and eating a piece of bread with jam, whose taste was sweet by the kindness of the quester and sour by the memories it brings. I was still eating when my mom called me on my phone. “Where the hell are you? ” she asks me with a worried voice which remembered me of my childhood when I was late coming home as I lost track of time playing with my friends.

“Im here, in our home in Warsaw”, I tell her as my throat closes up.