

Grace Johnston

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Tal's curse.

Kielce Poland

Ezra was raised a jewish boy in Kielce, Poland. His parents were traditional orthodox jews, and that was the way he was raised for a majority of his life. Throughout primary school, he was harassed and beaten for wearing his payot, as he attended a public school that mostly consisted of Christian children during this time. Over time, Ezra became disgusted with his own traditions and detested his own parents for putting this upon him.

One morning, years later, having dreamt the night before about his tormentors from the past, Ezra was now desperately seeking a solution to his lifelong dilemma. He sat for hours in his demure chambers pondering different lies and scenarios that he could use to his advantage to gain acceptance into the church. Hours later he stumbled across the idea of pity. He wondered what ways he could persuade his neighbor John, who was the bishop of the local church, to deem him worthy of forgiveness and acceptance. This stumped Ezra, as he didn't have a particularly hard or sad life, other than detesting his parents who were the catalyst of his harassment.

Ezra thought of people who actually did have sad lives, worse than his. He remembered a girl who he long-loved, Tal, that he knew from his earlier years in school. During his time of harassment, Tal was an obdurate advocate for defending Ezra. She had light blue eyes that almost seemed clear, and her hair was black as night. She was eloquently smart and polite, seemed like a normal girl, but she had a dark past. Tal came from a family of gypsies who immigrated to Poland after a family conflict earlier on. Ezra remembered the time that he saw bruises on Tal's arms and legs, when he asked her about them, her face went up in flames with embarrassment. She claimed that she had fallen off of her horse earlier that day, however Ezra was not buying into her story. He insisted that she told him the truth of where the bruises came from, and that's when Tal shattered into a million pieces right in front of him. As she hysterically cried, Ezra led her to a nearby bathroom where he comforted her and she confided in him. She divulged her heart and explained that her father struggled with alcoholism, her entire life and had lashed out on her and her mother frequently. Ezra remembered feeling gut wrenched at the pain this poor young girl had endured. He wanted to help her, which was the feeling that Ezra wanted the church to have towards him. Ezra contemplated the morality of claiming he was abused. In the end he justified it by

declaring that he was simply using other words to describe the same pain that he felt he endured for being Jewish.

Later that day, Ezra frantically stumbled up the gravel road to his neighbor John's house. John was a good man, and the bishop of the church, Ezra had known him his entire life and frequently confided in him over the trauma he faced. When John opened the door to find Ezra knocking on his door he was shocked, as Ezra had covered himself in soot and dirt. "Where have you been boy? What is all of this on your clothes?" John asked looking puzzled at Ezra. Ezra sobbed and looked up at the man, "My father, sir... It's my father. God has cursed him with an awful drinking problem, and he has lashed out on me sir." John stared concerned and shocked at the boy "You mean... he has harmed you?" Ezra started to feel guilt, he pushed it to the back of his throat and uttered "Yes sir. This isn't the first time, he... He has hit my mother before as well. She tried to keep me from running out the back door, but i couldn't stay there any longer... please don't tell anybody Dr. John." "Come inside boy. Let's get you cleaned up." John's wife, Mariee held Ezra's hand and led him up the narrow rickety stairway to the wash room.

Mariee gave Ezra some patchouli soap and a delicately embroidered towel, "You clean up good boy, you hear? It looks as though you may be staying here a while."

"Yes ma'am. Thank you ma'am." Ezra replied. Ezra was feeling some what redeemed of his guilt, as he was being rewarded for his lie. Once he finished bathing, he threw on a pair of clothes that Mariee had laid out for him. He went downstairs where John and Mariee were waiting for him on the satin tufted chairs in the corner of the study. "Where do you want to go from here Ezra?" John said as Ezra sat down across from them. "We can't let you go back home. That would just be inhumane." Mariee followed. "Well it's just that... it's just that their views Mr. and Mrs. Henley... they don't line up to God's word" Ezra replied and took a breath. "I want you to accept me into the

Church Mr. Henley. I can not live my life in this un-godly manner. I need redemption and forgiveness. Please sir, just think of me in the name of God. I desperately seek salvation..." Mr. and Mrs. Henley paused and looked blankly at Ezra. He began to worry that they knew what was going on. They got up and went into the kitchen. Shoot. They know. It's all over now. Ezra anxiously waited for the two to return. John came back into the study alone, "Ezra, you are a good young man and you don't deserve such cruel punishment. Mrs. Henley and I have decided to let you stay. You will be attending church with us 2 times a week, and you will help me maintain the church. Deal?" Ezra paused, "You mean... that... I'm allowed to stay here? I don't have to go back?" "No, you will not go back. Your parents will be taken into custody for their indulgences and abuse. You will not see them again Ezra." John replied.

It stung, but Ezra let it sink in. He accepted these terms graciously and after this day in 1920, Ezra remained a member of the church for all of the years to come. He detested his parents and cursed them for raising him a Jew. John took in Ezra as his own son, and changed his name to Eli, a more suitable name for his adopted lifestyle.

In 1930, Ezra moved out of the house, and traveled to Berlin, Germany to receive an education. Around this time, the Nazi party was being aroused, as Hitler was closer to being in power. Ezra decided to join the Nazi party in 1933 when Hitler came into authority. Since this time, Ezra has been a dedicated member to the Nazi party, and prejudiced the people he hated the most. The Jews. In 1936, Ezra was stationed to be a SS official at the Sachsenhausen Camp a little bit north of Berlin.

Sachsenhausen Camp, Berlin: December, 1937

Within the cold and thin December air where the smell of blood and rotting corpses lingered, the sensation of love oddly lingered in Eli's heart. There was a beautiful woman who Eli had grown very fond of at the camp. Leah, was her name, and she was about 17 years old, much younger than

Eli. She had beautiful caramel colored hair and hazel eyes. The only problem was that Leah was a jew. The thing was, Eli was just a deranged soul who didn't actually find a huge sense of pride in torturing those who were different, he did it just to spite his past, which was almost more psychotic. Because Eli wasn't consumed with hating jews, he didn't mind lying to Leah and sneaking into her private quarters where he was safe to pretend that he was a janitorial officer who just maintained the camp by force since he was a jew of higher status because he was only half Jewish. He had been lying to Leah about this since she was 15. Every evening when he went down his checklist of things to do, and made sure all other officers were in order, he always made a stop by Leah's quarters after he had changed out of his uniform, which Leah never saw him in because he was mostly stationed to the men's sanctions.

Eli felt sort of guilty because he loved Leah, and he knew what he was doing was wrong, he could never admit that though because he firmly stood by his actions. The thousands of people he saw on a daily basis being massacred and worked to death wasn't enough. If anything it was motivation because he knew that he could very well be one of those innocent people being murdered.

Hanz, another officer at the camp summoned Eli with his whistle out of emergency. "Sir, there has been a problem. Seven judenschwein (jew swines, a derogatory term used by SS officers) tried to escape this morning from S:3 C:F. We deem this act punishable by execution with your permission" Hanz shouted to Eli. "Of course. Chamber A is open for extermination. I will herd them with you."

Ezra proudly walked down the aisles between the bunking houses. After about 10 minutes, they reached sanction three cabin F, where seven women were handcuffed. Hanz went down the line and got the serial numbers off their wrists, and wrote them down. As Hanz gropingly recorded their numbers, Eli looked at all of the women. There was one woman standing in the back of the

line. She had mangly jet black hair that was still somehow radiant in all of its vileness, clear blue eyes that you could look right through and a tan emaciated body that looked like it was being drained of its color. Eli stared at the woman for about a minute and a half before she realized and looked up. It was Tal. Eli had not seen a familiar face in 10 years. He was living alone in Berlin before he became a part of the SS, so he never saw anyone from back home ever again. Eli was excited and wanted to catch up with Tal before he realized why she was here. Tal was a gypsy who he was about to execute. He knew he needed to find a way to spare her. When she looked up at him, she didn't recognize his face, probably due to exhaustion, and Eli had bleached his hair for quite some time now, and shaved most of it off. Eli thought quickly, "Hey! Hey in the back! I saw that look you just gave me. Do I need to handle you elsewhere?" Tal looked up puzzled and exhausted. Before she could reply, Eli grabbed her by the arm and dragged her down the gravel aisle behind a storage cabin.

He held her head up. "Tal. Tal, it's me. It's me, Ezra." She looked up disgusted, and paused. She couldn't find the words to say, as she was petrified. Tal loved Ezra, and she always knew that he had feelings for her as well. She was repulsed with the situation at hand and wanted to lunge at him with everything in her and strangle him. She felt betrayed and disgusted with Ezra and couldn't believe he was attempting to converse with her.

Eli stood hopefully waiting for a response. "You sick man. You are sick and twisted and wrong. You know where you came from and know exactly what this feels like. Helplessly being persecuted by those around you. You disgust me and you will burn in the firey pits of hell for this." Tal finally replied furiously. Eli laughed under his breath and took a step forward, when Tal spit in his face. Immediately Eli flung his arm out at her and slapped her in the face, knocking her to the ground. Tal was furious. Her blood began to boil the longer she looked at Eli. She looked around for a microsecond to

examine the perimeter, no one was around. In that second Tal decided to chant a spell at Eli. She began whispering latin tongues and closed her eyes. Eli stood there very puzzled with the situation at hand. Unaware of what was occurring, Eli stepped toward Tal. The chanting stopped. "It's finished." Tal said as she stared blankly with pride at Eli. "What's finished? What the hell are you talking about you psychotic witch?" Eli barked back at tal. "It doesn't matter. One day you will see the speck of pain you have caused me in the maelstrom of time."

Eli dragged Tal back to the station where she was to be executed. However, something was different when he returned. Leah was there. Leah was one of the seven women who attempted to escape with Tal and the others. He couldn't watch her be shot, but he had no choice. His heart ached and his stomach was turning in knots. Tal was eventually out of Eli's grip, and ran away because he was so distracted by what was going on with Leah. In his head he played out a million scenarios where he could save her. None resulted in the sparing of his life either so he threw all of the possibilities away. His black soul was crumpling and tearing at the seams. Leah and the six other women stood in a line. Tal was at the very end. Leah was in the very middle. Leah looked up only to find Eli who she loved staring at the ground in utter pain. She almost screeched when she looked up but she was immediately fired at when she fell to the ground.

One by one they each went down. One man was responsible for dragging their bodies out to the pit. He effortlessly threw them in as Eli watched in pain. He slumped back to his chambers and wailed into his pillow. The love of his life was taken away right in front of him. How could he go on?

Wales, England: 1963

After that day so many years ago, Eli was never the same again. He was traumatized by the events that took place at Sachsenhausen and he couldn't stay any longer. Tal had cursed him with perpetual hallucinations and flashbacks of the murders he committed. In 1941, he escaped the war and retreated to a exquisite cabin in Wales. The cabin was secluded and on a beautiful small lake in his backyard. In addition to the hallucinations, Tal's curse implemented that Eli would never leave his home again; He would be trapped inside his beautiful fortress, unlike the people he tortured at the camps who were perpetually trapped in hell on earth. Eli had no one to share his home with, as everyone he ever loved was dead.

He was alone. He was old and he was miserable.

He has lived in his cabin for 20 years alone until one day he woke up to a loud pounding at his door. He slumped down the stairs very confused as who it might be. He peeked through the blinds and saw no one there, but when he opened the door it was Leah. Eli gasped as Leah stood in the doorway soaking wet in a white embroidered nightgown. Her hair lost its vibrancy, it was a dull iridescent brown. Her eyes were consumed by dark circles.

She was dead.

Eli was old and delusional, she was the same Leah to him. He was still gasping in shock when he began to cry. After a few moments Eli reached out and gave Leah a hug. She didn't seem different, but she wasn't the same. Her body was cold and frail however, she still looked just as beautiful as she did all those years ago. Leah smiled demurely and was welcomed in warmly by Eli.

As Leah walked into the foyer of the cabin, she marveled at the open living room supported by high oak beams, that overlooked the lake that sat still behind the house. "That's really beautiful." Leah remarked as she remained in a trance by the quiet lake. "Thank you, I've lived here for almost 30 years now. You never get tired of waking up to something like that.

It hasn't been so easy though, I've put a lot of work into the house, someone came out and built that little dock for me a few years ago, it hasn't held up that well." Eli replied. "Well I think it's really lovely." Leah said as she began walking back to the kitchen.

Eli watched Leah graze her fingertips across the marbled countertops, "If you'd like, I can make us some tea and we can catch up for a while outside?" Leah nodded her head as she opened the glass paned french doors that lead to the dock. She followed a trail of large cobblestone rocks that dispersed at the edge of the water. Leah kicked around at the small fish that darted on the surface of the lake. One by one Leah pounded each small fish into the gravel beneath the water. She rabidly swarmed over the few fish that remained and plunged her hand into the cloud of blood, picking them up. She squeezed the fish into her palms and watch the life drain from each animal. She smirked as Eli hollered for her to come to the dock, as the tea was ready.

As Leah made her way to the dock, the sun began to set, and Eli poured the tea into intricately painted porcelain tea cups. Once Leah had a seat in the rusted-over bistro style chair, Eli looked up at the blood that consumed her hands. He paused for a moment and muttered "What's that Leah... on your hands?" Leah looked down at her hands as if nothing were there. "What do you mean Eli?" She replied, acting oblivious to the remains that were splattered all over her hands. Eli figured it was another hallucination, and that Tal was trying to torment him again, this time more apparently in front of Leah.

"I've missed you Eli." Leah murmured under her breath. Eli felt her words resonate through his entire body. He began to cry again, this time more softly and mournful, "I've longed for your touch, and I've missed you so much."

Leah looked up blankly at Eli. " Forever you can be with me Eli, and we can spend this eternity of misery together to escape the pronging of loneliness' toxic claws."

Eli, now crying even harder exclaimed, "How Leah? It's impossible! I can't leave this god forsaken cabin. I'm wearing clothes from 1933 and I've been alone for the past 30 years of my life. I haven't had contact with anyone except for you today."

"That's okay Eli, we can stay here together."

"Leah, why are you even here? You know that I can't leave! Are you trying to torment me?! Did someone send you?!" Eli screamed, confused and hysterical.

"No, I have been dead for the past 30 years Eli, I've been waiting to find you so we can be together."

"I can't be with you Leah, you know that I can't and I'm sorry."

Leah's blood began to boil when she replied, "Why not Eli? Because you're alive and I'm dead?! Last time I checked, that was your fault, not mine! You say you want to be with me but you're the one who took me away from this beautiful cruel world!"

Eli sobbed "I... I... I'm sorry Leah... I'm so sorry. I... -"

"ENOUGH!" Leah shouted as she began to chuck the porcelain teacups at Eli's face.

"What the hell are you doing Leah?!" He was bleeding all over his face and shrieking in pain.

Leah didn't reply, instead she started picking up forks and shouting at Eli hysterically. Eli scampered across the dock and tried to make his way to a small rowboat he had docked. Leah was much stronger and faster than Eli. She pounced toward Eli knocking him to the ground. "AAAGGGGHHHHHHH!!" Eli's face slammed into the old rickety dock. His face was now splintered with porcelain and wood. Blood was profusely pouring from Eli's skull.

"WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME??" Eli attempted to crawl further towards the boat when he felt a jolt of pain shoot up his leg. Leah had stabbed him in the akilles with a fork.

Eli was now in a fetal position screaming on the edge of the dock. He panicked as he saw Leah storming towards him out of the corner of his eye. "LEAH! PLEASE!!" She was now towering over him with the dock's torch. She swiped it across his face scalding him a few times. Eli shrieked in pain.

Eli was close enough to the edge so that he could roll over and land into the rowboat, taking a minor toll to the head however. Once Eli plunged over the edge into the boat Leah immediately kicked the boat pushing it at least 5 feet out into the lake. Eli felt a sense of relief. Maybe she was done?

...Only Eli was terribly mistaken.

Leah took the torch that she ripped off the dock post, and launched it into the boat.

Eli felt a wave of heat consume the inside, as he hid in the corner at the nose of the boat. Eli whipped his head around as fast as he could, and saw the torch in the corner. He frantically tried to make his way over to throw it out.

It was too late.

Moments after Leah threw the torch into the boat, It combusted into flames. Eli's screams pierced the air as his body was consumed by the flames. As he was scorching alongside the boat, he was being harassed and tormented by images of Leah that constantly replayed in his mind.

"You killed her."

"You killed her Ezra."

"You were just like her, only you cowardly hid from your true self."

Eli's screams continued for hours on end, only no one was there to hear them as the curse of Tal persisted even through those who resisted.