

The Night Before the Invasion

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Summers in Warsaw are relatively mild: a bit humid, not too warm. That summer, 1939, Eleanor's family had spent all of July and August visiting her grandparents, who lived on a farm in the country. She and her older sister Mary had spent the month hiking all around their grandparents' property and the surrounding farms, collecting leaves and flowers to dry and keep in their scrapbooks. Each evening, they would carefully hang the day's treasures up on a nail in the loft where they slept. Their grandfather helped them label the plants with a piece of cloth that they tied to the nail. By the end of the month, they had quite a collection—the loft was fragrant with the smell of dried flowers and grass, and the shadows of the plants were stiff and looked like winter.

At the end of August, they packed up their big trunk in preparation for returning to the city. Eleanor was sitting in the kitchen helping her mother and grandmother pack sandwiches and apples for the train trip.

"Are you sure you want to go back?" Eleanor's grandmother asked her mother.

"What else could we do?" her mother said. She shrugged. When Eleanor's mother shrugged like that, it meant that Eleanor's father had probably made the decision.

"Stay here, Rebecca. Stay with the children."

Eleanor's mother shook her head. "Joseph has already decided," she said. "We're going to wait it out."

Eleanor's grandmother shook her head. "This is a bad idea," she said.

Eleanor's mother did not respond. They finished packing the lunches in silence.

That night in bed, Eleanor couldn't sleep. They would have to leave the farm very early the next morning, but Eleanor's mind was busy—as her mother would say, it was whirring and stirring, mostly with questions. Why would it be a bad idea to go home? Why wouldn't her mother want to go back? Her father was there, had been working all summer in the dental office he owned with his brother. She poked Mary to see if she was awake, but Mary just groaned and turned over in bed.

Eleanor stared at the wooden ceiling of the loft. For some reason, she felt scared. Maybe it was the way her grandmother's voice sounded. Or the strange cryptic warning she had given her mother. At eleven years old, Eleanor knew some things about the world, but not much. She was just beginning to get a feel for the ways people spoke and the hidden messages in their words. Either way, Eleanor was not sure she wanted the summer to end.

The next morning, Eleanor's mother woke them up gently. It was still dark out, and Eleanor's grandparents were asleep. Mary carried the basket full of food, their mother carried

their trunk with a sling, and Eleanor held her little brother Alfred's hand as they walked a mile in the woods to the train station. On the train, all three children fell asleep. Eleanor woke up at one point to see her mother staring out the window, her arms crossed over her chest, her eyebrows furrowed low over her eyes.

When they reached Warsaw, their father was at the train station with Uncle Abraham. Eleanor was excited to see her father, and she ran into his arms when he held them out for a hug. He picked her up easily, and she felt immediately safe—all of her worries and fears from the night before melted away as he welcomed the rest of the family and they walked back to their home.

At the house, Mary went to her room to read and Alfred took a nap. Eleanor sat on the floor of the front room listening to the radio behind the couch as her parents talked. Eleanor was sure they didn't realize she was there.

"I'm worried, Joseph," her mother said.

"I have very good sources who say that it's going to be fine. Hitler signed a nonaggression pact with us... He can't flout international law and opinion so easily."

"Look what happened to Austria last year! And Czechoslovakia. Did you not hear about this Eichmann person in Prague? Jews had to pay damages when their homes and businesses were vandalized! Do you not get the news in Warsaw?"

Eleanor turned the volume of the radio down and inched closer to the back of the couch. Maybe this is what her grandmother was worried about... This Eichmann person.

"Rebecca, please be realistic and calm. Has your mother put hysterical notions in your head?"

"This isn't about my mother. This is about what's happening in Poland." Eleanor's mother sounded furious. She stood abruptly and left the room.

Eleanor's father sighed and leaned back into the couch so it creaked. He looked over the back of the couch and saw Eleanor lying on the floor.

"You little sneak," he said, and smiled. "Don't listen to your mother. Poland is a civilized country, just like any other."

Eleanor nodded. She didn't know what he was talking about, but she knew she had never seen her mother so angry.

The next morning, September 1st, Eleanor and Mary were playing in the street with their friends who lived in the neighborhood. Suddenly, their mothers all ran out of their houses and called for the children to come back inside, immediately. Once inside, Eleanor's mother locked the doors and closed the shutters on the windows. Planes screeched overhead, and on the radio, static was interspersed with German. Eleanor's father came home from work early, and

the family ate boiled potatoes and cold meat for dinner—all they had left in the pantry, since the groceries had closed early.

That night, Eleanor and Mary held hands in their bed. “What happened today?” Eleanor said.

“The Germans invaded Poland,” Mary said. “We are going to war with them.”

Eleanor was quiet. She had heard that in Germany, Jews were not allowed to work anymore, and had to have a special stamp in their passport. She wondered what would happen in the morning.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. How old is Eleanor at the time the events described by the passage are taking place?

- A) fifteen
- B) thirteen
- C) eleven
- D) nine

2. What is the climax of this story?

- A) The climax of the story is Eleanor's sleepless night before the train trip.
- B) The climax of the story is Rebecca's argument with Joseph.
- C) The climax of the story is Germany's invasion of Poland.
- D) The climax of the story is the conversation between Eleanor's mother and grandmother.

3. Eleanor's mother does not want to leave the grandparents' house.

What evidence supports this statement?

- A) She does not respond when the grandmother says leaving is a bad idea.
- B) She says that the family is going to "wait it out."
- C) She wakes the children up gently on the morning of the train trip.
- D) She says that Joseph has already decided the family would leave.

4. How does Eleanor feel about leaving her grandparents' house?

- A) indifferent and bored
- B) worried and confused
- C) sad and upset
- D) excited and cheerful

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A) a young girl's visit to her grandparents' house in the Polish countryside
- B) a young girl's attempts to listen in on private conversations
- C) a young girl and her family in the days before Germany's invasion of Poland
- D) the effects of Germany's invasion of Poland on the country as a whole

6. Read this sentence from the story.

“Eleanor woke up at one point to see her mother staring out the window, her arms crossed over her chest, her eyebrows furrowed low over her eyes.”

With this sentence, what might the author be telling readers about Eleanor’s mother?

- A) Eleanor’s mother is very tired.
- B) Eleanor’s mother is deeply worried.
- C) Eleanor’s mother is very comfortable on the train.
- D) Eleanor’s mother wants to go home to Warsaw.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Eleanor had been worried and scared when she left her grandparents’ house, ___ she felt safe as soon as her father picked her up at the train station.

- A) but
- B) and
- C) if
- D) because

8. Eleanor’s father, Joseph, does not think that Germany will invade Poland. Provide two pieces of evidence from the text to support this statement.

9. How does Eleanor’s mother, Rebecca, feel about the likelihood that Germany will invade Poland? Use three pieces of evidence from the passage to support your answer.

10. Throughout the passage, Eleanor does not fully know what is happening with the war, Germany, and the potential invasion of Poland. How do the actions, words, and feelings of Eleanor’s family members affect how Eleanor feels throughout the passage? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
