

Excerpts: *Suffer Not The Mole People*

Excerpt I

I say a quick prayer of thanks and implore the Lord: “Oh please dear Father, let it be our salvation. Let us find refuge from the storm.” And as we continue, I can see around the light the faint impression of a structure, a house. It takes greater shape with another flash of lightning behind the clouds. I am so filled with gratitude that I feel my heart will burst.

As we reach the house, I’m suddenly stopped in my tracks. The light from it barely illuminates a small object on the door post. I don’t know why, but it reminds me of something that fills me with fear.

“Rozalia, why have you s-stopped?” Mati asks me as I become aware that everyone has stopped with me.

“What is that object on the door post?”

“I have no idea, but what d-difference does it make?”

Father Moczygamba has come up to us. “Mati, why are we stopped here? Is there some problem?”

“I don’t know, Father. Rozi, what in the n-name of all that’s holy are you af-fraid of?”

“I...I don’t... Father, what is that object—there on the door post?”

He looks and seems somehow excited when he says, “It’s a mezuzah. This is a Jewish household!”

Mati starts toward the door but I hold him back. “Rozi, what on earth is the m-matter?”

“Mati, they’re...they’re *Jews*!”

“And...?” he asks, I can tell rather annoyed at my stopping our progress to shelter.

“We’re...we’re Christians!”

“And...!” he demands, even more annoyed.

“Mati, we can’t... I can’t allow... How can we ask for help from Jews?”

“Rozi, Rozi! how can we not?!”

“But...but...they’re Christ killers!”

Mati looks at me with mounting impatience. “Rozalia, our S-Savior was killed almost t-two thousand years ago. How can anyone now be held r-responsible for that?”

“Their *people* killed our Savior.”

Mati is getting more and more exasperated. How can he not understand?

“And our p-people have committed untold b-barbarities against them,” he roars. Should you and I and our ch-children be held accountable for that?”

“I...I can’t... Father, please explain... We don’t know what they do, what they worship...”

Father Moczygamba is more gentle with me than my husband. “Rozi, our *Savior* was a Jew. The founder of the Catholic Church was a Jew. Saint Paul, our preeminent philosopher was a Jew. “And they worship the same God we do, Rozi. They are His chosen people.”

Excerpt II

I make my way forward to challenge this storm to make me cower before it. As I dare wind, sea and weather to work their malevolence, a huge wave comes over the bow and knocks me back against the leeward bulwark and almost overboard. I'm mercifully reminded of how frail we human beings are before the forces of nature.

With aching ribs and bereft of wind, I struggle to stand, and my hand finds a discarded length of clewline. I rise and place my back firmly against the foremast and wrap the strand of clewline around the post and myself, affixing myself to it with a knot my brother Michlik taught me.

My brother, Michlik. As I think of him by his nickname, a tiny and most unexpected kernel of pleasure echoes in the chambers of my grief. It mingles with that that eludes naming. How odd it is that when he taught me this bowline knot, I wondered of what value such knowledge could possibly be, and why I was submitting to the instruction. Such a simple—I thought, valueless—skill. And now, it is the only thing keeping me from being swept to oblivion.

How ironic, I think, the value of something so simple, so mundane. And curiously, I'm suddenly struck with the memory of Sol's answer to my plaintive question of what purpose we humans can have absent the achievement of the ideal: "to learn to properly hold a child," he said almost flippantly. Likewise, such a simple directive. But now, how I marvel at its profundity. And how it echoes the solace that will not suffer itself to be defined.

As I try to parse this seeming paradox, the bow of the ship rises to an impossible height and then crashes into the trough of the next monstrous wave. And out of that noisome instinct of survival, I fill my lungs to bursting and hold just before the wave washes over me and we plunge into the waters' depths.

As we rise again, I realize now that I took pleasure in my brother's teaching me that simple knot. And hard on its heels is the acknowledgement of the sense of satisfaction I felt when Sol corrected my embrace of little Anika. Buried beneath the profound awkwardness, I now recognize a fleeting sense of solidity, of grounding.

Once again, as the ship carries me aloft and then plunges me into its depths, those unarticulated twinges of hope amid the grief struggle to name themselves. It floods my mind with memories now seen in a new light. My mother's clumsy effort to talk to me of my fear. Only now, as we plumb the depths of the ocean's fury, do I realize how agonizing it must have been for her, having to overcome her own discomfort at speaking of my feelings. And as we rise again, I now recognize how frustrating it must have been for her, rewarded only with my taciturnity.

Another even steeper wave lifts me to incalculable heights and plummets me seemingly to the bottom of the ocean. I remember with a piercing ache the simplicity of my father's gentle pat on the hand to say he understood why I clung to his arm so tightly. And I think I begin to understand myself.

So many memories follow hard upon those as we begin to rise: Urszula's interventions, Micklik's interest in my studies, even Maryanna's—Marika's—grateful embrace on the Odra.

And so now, as we break free of the killing waters' depths, I cry in desperation, "Grandfather Johann, please, I beg you, tell me stories! Tell me stories so obvious and mundane that their message could be gleaned by the simplest child. Tell me stories that you've told so many times that the words hardly change. Let me be back with you in the freezing cold of winter or the sweltering heat of summer and I will listen with care and hope...and love!"