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Antoinette Moses
Excerpt
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Chapter 1 *Only me, Jojo*

It's dark again. So it's evening. It's the third evening. No, I'm wrong. It's the fourth evening.

It's . . . Tuesday . . . Wednesday . . . Thursday. Yes, it's Thursday. Why do I count the days? Why do I say it's Thursday? There aren't any more days. There's just time. Time when it's dark, and time when it's light.

Everything is dead, so why not days, too? Yes. No more days. No more Thursdays. There's only now.

And there's only me. Why? Why aren't I dead, too?

That's a stupid question, Jojo, I say to myself. You know why you aren't dead. You aren't dead because you weren't in the house. You were in the fields when the men came. But that's not my question. I want to know why I was in the fields. Why wasn't I in the house with my family?

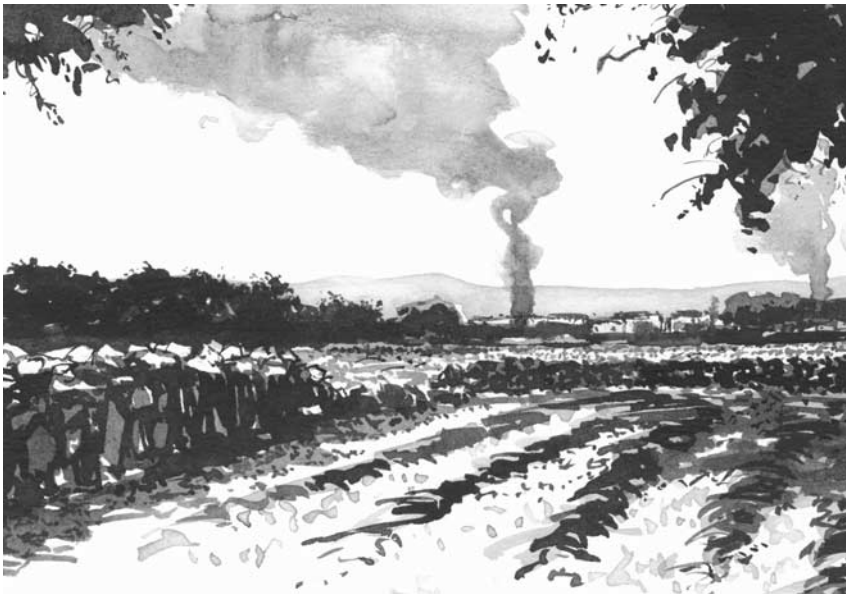
There are no answers to questions like that, Jojo, I tell myself. I have to talk to myself because there isn't anyone else. I think there are mice here. I can hear them at night. You can't talk to mice. But there aren't any other people. There's only me. Jojo.

I know this because I listen. I listen all day and all night. I hide in our stable, where the horse lived. And I hear nothing. Just the mice. The village is quiet. There is smoke now, but smoke is quiet. The fires were noisy, but the fires have stopped. It rained yesterday, and after the rain there were no more fires. Just smoke.

Of course, I'm not the only thing alive here. As well as

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the mice, there's a dog somewhere in the village. I can hear it. And there are rats and flies. But I think I'm the only person here. All the others are dead.

Everyone in the village is dead. There's only me now and I don't know what to do.

I'm not in our house. I went into our house after the men went away. So I saw my family. All of them on the floor. All the blood on the floor, too. They were all dead. My mother, my father, my sister, my brother. My family.

Jojo, don't think about that, I say to myself. Don't think about the blood. Don't think about those things. But I can't stop thinking about them. My mother had no clothes on. I've never seen my mother without clothes. Perhaps I will go into the house tomorrow and put some clothes on my

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mother. She must be cold without clothes. But I'm afraid that the men are going to come back.

Perhaps they are looking for me. Perhaps they will come back for me. Perhaps I want them to find me. Then I can be dead, too. I don't want to be the only one alive.

Come on, Jojo, I say to myself. You are the man of the family now. You must be a big boy. You must be strong.

It's difficult to be strong when you're ten. And I'm only just ten. My birthday was last month. In July.

I got a bicycle for my birthday. It was white. It was a wonderful bicycle. I cycled to school on it every day.

There isn't a school here any more. There was a big fire there and now there's just smoke. I don't know where my bicycle is. But I don't want it any more.

I don't understand why the men came to our village. It's

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not a very rich village. We don't have very much. We're not like the people in the big towns. My brother went to live in the town. He told us about the cars and the shops and all the things there.

Why didn't my brother stay in the town? Why did he come back here? Why did he die? He was always laughing. He was always so nice to everyone. He wanted to be a teacher. He went to the town to study. My father said that my brother was a good son. He worked hard. He wasn't going to be a poor farmer like my father. I said I was going to study hard, too, and my father laughed. His big laugh. The laugh that made his tummy go up and down. 'I like that,' he said. 'That's good. I'll have two sons to look after me when I'm old.'

'I'm going to study too,' said my sister.

'Just find a rich husband,' said my father.

'I don't want a rich husband,' my sister told me. 'I'm going to be a teacher like our brother. You see, Jojo, our father doesn't know, but there are lots of women teachers in the town. Our brother told me.'

But my sister can't be a teacher now. She's dead on the floor. There was blood on her legs. I pulled down her skirt. It wasn't nice like that. My sister was always very nice. She was kind, too. Why did the men hurt her? She never hurt anyone.

Sometimes I want to die now, too. But sometimes I don't. I don't want to die.

I sit at the back of the stable. The stable is where our horse slept at night. But the men took away all the horses. I heard them. I'm happy that our horse is alive. She was a good horse. I gave her nuts. She liked eating nuts.

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I'm very hungry, but I don't want to look for food. I'm afraid one of the men will come back and see me.

I'll stay here and be very quiet. Then no-one will find me.

It's dark now. I can hear the mice. Or perhaps they're rats. I'm not afraid of them. They are probably hungry. I'm so hungry I can't sleep.

Don't think about food. Think about something else. Then I'll forget how hungry I am. Perhaps I'll talk to my mother. Or my brother or my sister. I like to think about them. Perhaps that's why I'm alive. So one day I can tell people about them. I'm Jojo, I'll say. I'm alone now, but once I had a family.

My grandmother said that when people die, they go away very slowly. After they die, they stay in the air so you can say goodbye to them. 'You mustn't be afraid of ghosts,' she told me. 'Ghosts are good. You can talk to them and they will help you.'

I think that there are lots of ghosts here. I think that my grandmother was right.

I'm going to tell them that I'm here. This is Jojo, I'll say. I'm not dead and I won't let the men find me. I'll stay here and I'll talk to you so you won't feel so sad.

Maybe the ghosts will help me.

There's a sound outside the stable. There's something there. Something bigger than a mouse. I don't know what it is. And now I can hear another sound. A bigger sound, like a lorry. It is a lorry. A lorry is coming here to the village. The men are coming here.

I'll be very quiet. Perhaps they won't find me.

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