

"Once" by Morris Gleitzman . Chapter 11

Felix is feeling much better but is terrified for his parents and desperate to get out of the cellar to try and find and protect them. He is feeling guilty and blames himself for putting them in danger because just before they put him in the orphanage they had a plan to get Visas to America but when they went to collect them Felix offended the man at the desk by asking if the birth marks on his face were caused by him sticking his face in a dragon's mouth.

Barney goes out every night to get food and water for the children. He locks the door in the cellar ceiling because they are hiding from Nazi patrols. Felix stays awake one night and tells Barney that he has to go with him outside. Barney lets him go up with him so they can speak without waking the others. When they are out of the cellar Felix can see that they are in a room with machinery and Barney explains that they are printing presses for printing books.

Felix makes up a story about needing to find his parents urgently. He tells Barney that he has a rare disease and his parents have his medicine and that if he doesn't get the medicine in 2 hours that he could die. Barney doesn't believe him because Zelda had told him that Felix had not seen his parents for nearly 4 years, but he is not angry with Felix for lying. He tells Felix Zelda had told him that he is a good story teller and that he read some of the stories in his notebook which show that this is true. He tells Felix that he is glad that he wants to go along with him tonight and that he needs his help.

Felix sees that there is a bullet hole in the back of Barney's leather jacket and he wonders if Barney was shot in the past and if his family was shot as well and maybe that is why he is looking after other people's kids in a secret cellar. Barney warns Felix that if they are seen leaving the building then the cellar will be found, and they will all be captured.

When they sneak onto the streets Felix is surprised that there are no people out on the streets at all. All the buildings are in darkness and the electricity isn't working. There are some dead bodies just lying out in the street and there is rubbish everywhere and some of the buildings are falling down. Felix is brave and keeps going and tells is that "I manage not to cry." He asks Barney why there are no people in the streets and Barney tells him that the Nazis have brought in a curfew that starts at 7pm. No-one is allowed outside after this time and if you are caught in the streets you will be shot. Barney explains that this is the Jewish Ghetto , a part of the city where the Jews are forced to live and where the Nazis make the rules for them. Barney then tells Felix that he might never find his parents. Felix ignores him and asks if all the Jews have been brought to this ghetto or are there other ghetto places as well. Barney doesn't answer this question, he probably does not want to tell Felix about the death camps where most of the Jews have been taken.

Barney brings Felix into an apartment where a group of Jews are standing around a bed. They are all wearing Jackets as there is no heating and a man in the bed is groaning and holding his head. Felix finds out that Barney is a dentist and that he has come to help this man. His leather bag holds all his equipment and supplies. He tells Felix that he needs his help. He takes out his drill and gets ready to take the mans tooth out, but he has no pain killers. As Barney is getting ready, he asks Felix to start telling the man a story. Felix realises that there are no pain dulling medicines left in the ghetto so Barney is hoping that a story will distract the man from his pain and ease his suffering and help him to cope and endure better. Felix starts telling him a story and the man looks at him rather than the drill.

Felix then goes with Barney to another door. He praises Felix and tells him that

"Poor Mr Grecki was in a lot of pain, but your story helped him get through it. Well done"

Felix is delighted and feels like he is “glowing”. He is beginning to become more like his old self again after he became depressed and hopeless after the march to the city and the trauma of what happened when they arrived in the city. Now he is happy to help and look out for others again and his faith in stories is coming back which shows us that even though he is living through incredibly tough and difficult times he still has faith that things might get better and he wants to fight to make them better in any way that he can.

Barney tells him that this visit will be very different, and Felix is shocked when a Nazi answer the door. They are taken to a Nazi officer who has a bad toothache and Felix then understands why the Nazi soldier let Barney take Zelda and didn’t shoot him. The Nazis need him to be a dentist for any soldier who has trouble with their teeth. Barney tells Felix to tell the Nazi officer a story about Germany. Felix doesn’t speak German, but Barney tells him to say it in Polish and that he will translate it into German for the officer. Barney starts examining the officer’s mouth and tells Felix to start. Felix is feeling nervous and wants to tell a story about how it is wrong to burn books or shoot people but thinks it would be dangerous to tell a story like that.

A soldier brings a bag of food with bread, turnips and cabbage and Felix understands how Barney gets food every night. Then he starts telling a story about two brave German soldiers in the African jungle trying to find and mend a windmill. He lets his imagination run wild and makes up an exciting story with lots of wild, talking animals and some of them are praising Hitler. The officer is amused and entertained by the story that Felix tells him even though Felix is afraid that he might start shooting people at any minute and he has to try hard to stop his voice from wobbling with fear. Felix wants the officer to like him because he is planning to ask him if he knows where his parents have been taken.

- 1) Why is Felix feeling guilty, what does he want to do and how does he try to get Barney to agree to let him do it ?
- 2) What does Felix notice about Barney’s jacket and what does it make him wonder ?
- 3) What does Felix learn about conditions and life in the Jewish ghetto?
- 4) Why do you think Barney doesn’t answer when Felix asks him if all the Jews have been put in this ghetto ?
- 5) Why has Barney brought Felix with him and what does Felix learn about Barney ? (How he is getting food – why the Nazis have not shot him)
- 6) How is Felix coming back to his old self and what does he learn once more about stories ?