

## **NIGHT SUMMARY II**

In 1941, Eliezer, the narrator, is a twelve-year-old boy living in the Transylvanian town of Sighet (then recently annexed to Hungary, now part of Romania). He is the only son in an Orthodox Jewish family that strictly adheres to Jewish tradition and law. His parents are shopkeepers, and his father is highly respected within Sighet's Jewish community. Eliezer has two older sisters, Hilda and Béa, and a younger sister named Tzipora.

Eliezer studies the Talmud, the Jewish oral law. He also studies the Jewish mystical texts of the Cabbala (often spelled Kabbalah), a somewhat unusual occupation for a teenager, and one that goes against his father's wishes. Eliezer finds a sensitive and challenging teacher in Moshe the Beadle, a local pauper. Soon, however, the Hungarians expel all foreign Jews, including Moshe. Despite their momentary anger, the Jews of Sighet soon forget about this anti-Semitic act. After several months, having escaped his captors, Moshe returns and tells how the deportation trains were handed over to the Gestapo (German secret police) at the Polish border. There, he explains, the Jews were forced to dig mass graves for themselves and were killed by the Gestapo. The town takes him for a lunatic and refuses to believe his story.

In the spring of 1944, the Hungarian government falls into the hands of the Fascists, and the next day the German armies occupy Hungary. Despite the Jews' belief that Nazi anti-Semitism would be limited to the capital city, Budapest, the Germans soon move into Sighet. A series of increasingly oppressive measures are forced on the Jews—the community leaders are arrested, Jewish valuables are confiscated, and all Jews are forced to wear yellow stars. Eventually, the Jews are confined to small ghettos, crowded together into narrow streets behind barbed-wire fences.

The Nazis then begin to deport the Jews in increments, and Eliezer's family is among the last to leave Sighet. They watch as other Jews are crowded into the streets in the hot sun, carrying only what fits in packs on their backs. Eliezer's family is first herded into another, smaller ghetto. Their former servant, a gentile named Martha, visits them and offers to hide them in her village. Tragically, they decline the offer. A few days later, the Nazis and their henchmen, the Hungarian police, herd the last Jews remaining in Sighet onto cattle cars bound for Auschwitz.