

J O S H A . B R E W E R

The Bakeries of Warsaw

h ad cold stones for three weeks in 1939. Kielbasa disappeared from the butcher's shop, cabbage from the market. No food left in the house for her mother, little Rachael. Vinegar in the cabinet, salt. Rationing meant nothing in the streets. Stamps were useless. Your grandmother stood in a snowy queue. An icicle formed slowly on your mother's tiny nostril. When they got to the front of the line, the store had one can of baking powder left on the shelf, more vinegar and salt. Not even pickles. So when sourdough leaven finally filled the cold air, your grandmother left with two burlap sacks, no matter what the radio claimed. She would not be late, she said. "Stay here. Lock the door. Don't let anyone else in." That same air (wafting rye notes now, promises) brought the sirens through the window. As the savory sweet rolls, gingerbread, *pączki* arrived in your mother's nose, in her mind, almost on her tongue—out on the street, four blocks away—a single continuous tone entered your grandmother's ears. Then your mother's. Then the bombs fell and neither heard anything. Your mother watched out the window until it grew dark, and she smelled something novel. It was not a bakery. She never really left that flat. The new aroma never left her.

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