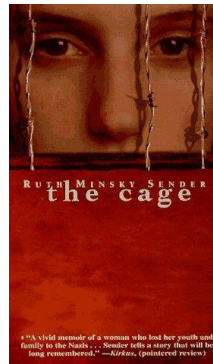


Chapter summaries of.....

## **The Cage by Ruth Minsky Sender**



### **Part I**

#### **Chapter 1**

It is present day on a warm spring day and Ruth is watching her daughter play. She tells of the nightmares that she has. These nightmares are about her past. She refers to her daughter, Nancy, as part of the “generation that was never supposed to exist.” When Nancy asks about her grandparents, Ruth explains that they were killed in the Holocaust.

#### **Chapter 2**

It is a flashback to Lodz, Poland in 1939. There are whispers of war in Europe. Riva is 13 years old and her family is preparing for Passover. The neighbors, Mrs. Gruber and her son, Harry are invited over for the Pesach meal. Riva’s mother saves Harry from an angry mob that accuses him of being a German spy.

#### **Chapter 3**

It is Autumn and Germany has invaded Poland, bringing war to Europe. The people of Poland begin to search their family history for any German heritage (volkdeutsche). The Grubers move into a nice Jewish home and Harry shows up wearing a Hitler Youth uniform. Mrs. Gruber and Mr. Brown steal the oven and fur coats from Riva’s house and they cut down the oak tree outside.

#### **Chapter 4**

It is April, 1940. Riva and her sister are forced to wear a yellow star that labels them as Jewish. Riva’s sister is proud to wear the star as a symbol of her being Jewish. Riva’s three older siblings are sent away to Russia because they are older and capable of going alone. Riva is kicked by a Nazi soldier because she is walking on the sidewalk. She falls into the gutter. The Nazi soldiers force the crowd to run frantically and Riva witnesses a pregnant woman being kicked by a soldier. During the mayhem a 10 year old boy grabs on to Riva for protection. Riva sees her friend, Abram, a sixteen year old deaf mute. The men, women and children are separated.

#### **Chapter 5**

It is May, 1940 in the gated ghetto of Lodz, Poland. Riva describes it as 180,000 Jews in a barbed-wire cage. There is no work for the Jews and no school for the children. The *Judenrat*,

a Jewish council appointed by the Nazis to watch over the people of the ghetto is a focus of the anger of the people in the ghetto. The people of the ghetto speak out against the council because they want work and they want food. Riva's brother, Laibele, contracts tuberculosis and cannot get to the food lines any longer. The family rations their food for Laibele. Riva and her mother are employed making coats for the Germans. The family learns from the doctor that there is no cure for Laibele.

## Chapter 6

It is September, 1942. A sense of quiet has come over the ghetto. The silence is broken by the commands of the Nazis. Houses are being searched and Mama fears that the Nazis will come to take Laibele. It is decided that he will be hidden in the cellar to keep him safe. When the soldiers arrive they separate the family. Mama is put on a wagon and taken away as her children watch.

## Chapter 7

One morning, as Riva is getting out of bed her legs buckle and she falls. When she tries to rise again, she falls once more. Moishle and Motele surprise Riva with a tangerine, hoping that it will make her better. Riva tells them that they will share the tangerine. Riva is determined to get well. Riva refers to her siblings as her kids.

## Chapter 8

Moishe, a neighbor, is determined to get Riva to a doctor. Riva calls Moishe crazy because she knows that getting a doctor to a house in the ghetto is almost impossible. One morning, Moishe comes to the house telling Riva to get dressed because they are going to the doctor. Not being able to walk, Riva protests but she is carried by Moishe all the way to the doctor. Upon seeing Riva, the doctor has a look of frustration and pity on his face. He says that Riva is suffering from malnutrition and that there is nothing he can do for her.

## Chapter 9

Riva and Laibele talk about what they would do if the war ended today. They think about Mama and their sisters, Mala and Chanale and they think about their brother, Yankele. They wonder if they are still alive. The children agree that they must continue their education and keep learning, it was what Mama wanted. Motele gives Riva a bottle of vitamins to make her better. Motele explains that the children have traded their week's rations of bread for the medicine. Riva takes the vitamins and starts to regain her strength.

## Chapter 10

A woman from the Child Welfare Department visits the house and tells the children that they are too young to live alone. She tells them that they will be separated and put into foster

homes. The woman visits several times bringing vitamins and medicine and telling the children that they will be adopted. Riva, Moishele, and Motele are summoned to appear at the Child Welfare Department. They leave believing that they will be separated and adopted by other families. Riva receives word from the Child Welfare Department that she will be allowed to adopt her brothers and become their legal guardian.

### Chapter 11

Motele and Moishele are working in a tailor shop making German military uniforms. Riva observes that all of the children look older than they actually are. Laibele wonders aloud if the world outside the ghetto is different. He wonders if they have been forgotten, has God forgotten them. A knock at the door sends the children into a state of fear. They were expecting Mrs. Avner. They fear that it is the Nazis coming to find the sick. When they hear a voice it sounds familiar. It sounds like Mr. Shmulek, their neighbor and friend. He has been away as a volunteer for a labor camp. When Riva sees Mr. Shmulek she calls out to him and he is shocked to see her. He tells her that he thought there was no one left at the house.

### Chapter 12

Mr. Shmulek explains to Riva how he was able to return to the ghetto from the labor camp. Shmulek describes how he was told by the Nazis that the more he worked the better the treatment of his family back in the ghetto would be. He had hope that if and when he returned home he would find his family well. The guilt of leaving and the loss of his family are causing Shmulek to blame himself for their being gone. Motele stops Shmulek and explains that he did what he had to do for his family. Moishele invites Shmulek to stay and live with them. Riva does not like the idea of a man staying in the house and she is concerned that people will get the wrong idea. Shmulek will stay with the neighbor Henry. Riva writes a letter to her mother about the day's events and puts it in a drawer with other letters that she has written.

### Chapter 13

There is a sharp knocking at the door, it is the Jewish police. They are looking for Shmulek, they want to take him back to the labor camp. As the police search the house Riva wonders how fellow Jews could act like this. The family denies having seen Shmulek since he was sent away to the labor camp a year ago. The police officer explains that the commandant that sent Shmulek back to the ghetto made a mistake because he was drunk. When they are through searching, the policemen leave. Henry is told about the search and Shmulek is moved to a friend's house for several weeks until the police stop searching for him in the ghetto.

### Chapter 14

It is winter. Riva and Laibele talk about how everything is different than it used to be and that maybe they will learn from today and come out stronger, better people. They think about the oak tree that was cut down by the Jews for firewood. Riva thinks about how the wood from

that tree would have kept them warm. Motele is determined to get wood for warmth. He acts as a look out when men tear down a shed and he receives some of the wood. Two ghetto policemen come to the house searching for the stolen wood. They find some of the wood under Laibeles' mattress. The policemen want to take Riva, the oldest, to the police station. Moishlele begs the officers to take him instead. The officers decide not to take Riva but they tell Motele that he must go to the police station tomorrow to be punished for stealing the wood. The family spends a sleepless night worrying about what will happen to Motele when he faces the judge the next day. Motele and Moishlele return from the police station, having faced a compassionate judge. The judge did not give them the normal punishment of a slave labor camp, he sentenced Motele to cleaning the outdoor toilets for two weeks.

### Chapter 15

It is spring. Pesach (Passover) has arrived and it is very different from the past. Riva is thinking about the way the holiday was in the past and how much she misses Mama. She wonders what has happened to her. Laibele dies as Riva screams to him to keep fighting. The wagon for the dead comes and takes Laibele away.

### Chapter 16

Riva meets Yulek Schwatz, sent to the house to help by the Skif, the children's socialist movement. Although Riva is a member of the Skiff, she has never met Yulek because he is a new member. Yulek comes to the house every evening, sometime bringing his sister. He explains that his father and mother are gone and that he is a father to his sister, like Riva is to her brothers. Yulek reads poetry to Riva and encourages her to continue writing in her journal. Riva expresses her frustration that the letter she has written will never be mailed. Yulek gets angry at her for talking that way and helps her to realize that they must survive to tell their stories.

### Chapter 17

Word comes that the family must leave their home within a few weeks because their house is to be torn down for firewood. Riva and her brothers find it very difficult to leave their home because they are all that is left of their family. Their new house, a former grocery store, has a large cellar that Motele says will be good for hiding from the Nazis. Although books are not allowed in the ghetto, a secret library has been built in a home nearby. It is decided that Riva's new house will be a better location for the secret library.

## Chapter 18

The house has become a meeting place and a place where secret information is shared with others. Riva and her brothers have been hiding people in the cellar to protect them from the Nazis. When Riva goes back to work at the tailor shop she is met by the angry glances of her coworkers who are normally very nice to her and look out for her. Riva learns that her name was on a list of teenagers from the shop to be deported but Mr. Berkenwald, the manager, removed her name and put another child's name there in its place. Berkenwald explains that he removed her name because she had to stay alive to take care of her brothers.

## Chapter 19

It is the start of spring and Passover is quickly approaching. Yulek continues to come to the house to read poetry with Riva and to talk about his hopes and dreams. Riva is beginning to wonder whether she is having feelings other than friendship for Yulek. Moishelle and Motele tell Riva that she needs to have new clothes for Pesach. They have once again traded their bread rations so that an old coat can be made into a new suit for Riva.

## Chapter 20

Yulek arrives with the news that his name and his sister's name is on the list of people to be deported. Riva tries to convince him to hide in the cellar but Yulek is determined to stay with his sister to protect her. Yulek asks Riva to not forget him as they walk back to Yulek's house. Once inside, Riva sees Faygele, Yulek's sister, and notices that she looks a lot like the picture of Yulek's mother. The belongings in the house are packed up and Yulek assures Riva that he will return.

## Chapter 21

It is four months since Yulek has been deported and there has been no news of him. The Nazis are trying to convince the Jewish people of the ghetto to leave voluntarily by offering them food and a promise of safety. Nazi commander Biebow has been making announcements that he wants to protect the people of the ghetto from the Russians, who are coming closer every day. He tells the people that they are valuable workers and that he cares about them. The messages of "do not volunteer" and "hide" spread throughout the ghetto. Riva stops going to work and she and her brothers hide in the cellar when the Nazis come looking for people to deport. This becomes a constant thing.

## Chapter 22

The Nazis are emptying the ghetto quickly using brutal force. Riva and her brothers speak of the library of books that has survived for the five years they have been in the ghetto. Riva says that the books are a symbol of the spirit of the people that the Nazis could not destroy. Riva and her brothers decide that it is safer if they voluntarily go to the railroad station and leave the ghetto. It is difficult for them to decide what they should bring with them on this journey to the unknown. Riva packs her journal and they will leave with their neighbors in the morning. All the while Riva is thinking of the words of mama... *"if hope is lost, all is lost"*.

## Chapter 23

The next morning the neighbor, Mrs. Boruchowich, her son Laibish and her daughter, Rifkele come ready to leave for the railroad station. Mrs. Boruchowich speaks of her daughter, Chanele, who has died and wonders who will cry at her grave now that they are leaving her behind in the ghetto. Riva looks at the books as she leaves thinking to herself "they will survive". There are other people in the streets with their bundles of belongings heading for the station. Riva and the boys are not the only ones leaving today.

## Chapter 24

Riva and the others try to not get separated as they approach the station and the crowd that is there. They notice that the train is made up of cattle cars and that they will be forced to crowd into them in the severe heat. Everyone makes it into the same car. The car is dark and Riva can see little as the only light coming in is through the cracks in the wood. Riva and her brothers make plans should they become separated. The train arrives at its destination and music is playing. A German voice comes over the loudspeaker saying *"Welcome to Auschwitz, Jews."*