

Haunted by a lost secret, Anita searches for clues in memories of her childhood and the stories she was told, including her parents' harrowing experiences in Auschwitz.

Castles in the Sky

By Anita Cukier

Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11853.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



Castles in the Sky

Anita Cukier

Copyright © 2019-2021 Anita Cukier

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-64719-663-9

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-664-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2021

Cover Design: Aron Cukier

Editing: Shane Cullen

Contents

A Call to Fela.....	1
Oranges and a Memorable Dinner Party.....	5
Dance of Death.....	11
After the Dinner Party.....	25
Learning How to Imagine.....	27
A Castle in the Sky for Christmas.....	33
Pseudo Appendicitis and The Gypsy.....	39
A New Bicycle and a Downward Spiral of Speculation.....	45
The Cost of Luxury in Communist Poland.....	53
New Realities and Old Falsities.....	59
Another Lie.....	69
A New Beginning.....	77
The Mother I No Longer Recognized.....	83
Another Castle in the Sky.....	95
Family Reunion.....	99
Bar Mitzvah.....	111
The Barber of Auschwitz.....	117
Turning Points.....	125
Revelations.....	137

A Call to Fela

A few days after my mother's death, I called Fela, one of her closest friends from Poland, who had lived in Israel for many years. After conveying her condolences, a short silence followed, then she said "Your Mother shared a secret with me and made me promise I would share with you, but only after she died."

Before I could even take a breath, she added "I am too distraught right now, but I will call you in a few days"

I did not hear from her for more than a week and, as anxiety began to twist my stomach, I called. As soon as she picked up the phone, Fela told me that she and her husband had decided that I did not need to know. For two years, I called regularly and begged, only to hear the same. Then, suddenly, the phone was disconnected. A couple of my friends who live in Israel went to Fela's apartment to inquire, but no one had seen Fela or her husband for a while and did not know what had happened to them. I tried to convince myself to forget about the secret since it was very unlikely that I would ever find out what it was. But I could not and still cannot. What could have been so terrible that my mother could not share it with me while she was alive?

Both my parents were Holocaust survivors. Unknowingly, they were in Auschwitz at the same time and both escaped before its liberation. They met right after the war and married very soon after. I was born ten months later. They were as different as night and day. They should never have married.

I found out that my father was in Auschwitz when I was about five years old. One day, I saw him crying as he was rubbing the number 126791 tattooed on his arm. When I asked "What is that on your arm?" he hugged me, and gently explained "During the war, I was in a place called Auschwitz. It was a very bad place run by bad people who tattooed all their prisoners"

"What is a prisoner? Did it hurt?" I asked.

"When you are older, I will tell you more about it, but right now let's have some cake."

When I asked my mom if she had also been in a camp, she enthusiastically suggested we read the new book she just bought for me.

But I knew that she was, because any time I complained about my food, she would say “When I was in Auschwitz I would have given everything for even one bite of what you are eating!”

I was a curious child, and, over the years, I made many attempts to get more information from my parents, but to no avail. I finally stopped probing because at some point I realized that it was painful for them to talk about it. After a while, I just forgot about it. When we moved to Australia I slowly learned much more, but it was not until I was in my early twenties, after I moved to the US, met other children of survivors and read many books about the Holocaust, that I began to fully comprehend how that horrific experience had affected my parents’ lives. And how appropriately the term ‘survivor’ described those who lived through the Holocaust.

Now, faced with my mother’s secret, *the* secret, I keep asking myself if it had something to do with Auschwitz? When they refused to talk about the Holocaust, were my parents protecting me from the horrors of their experience, or, were they also guarding something else, something somehow even darker.

Throughout his life, whenever I broached the subject of the Holocaust with my father, he would simply hug me and repeat how lucky and very grateful he was that he survived. But I knew that he continued to have horrible nightmares and that his outward happiness and gratitude must have been juxtaposed with horrible memories. My Mother, too, refused to talk about it. She would cut me short, and say “It is something that I never think about anymore.” I believed her. After all, she was a sorceress and had easily convinced not just me, but so many people, that if you want something hard enough, and believe you can make it happen, it will.

But now I wanted to know about the secret but didn’t know where to start to look for the answers. My first instinct told me that it had something to do with my mother and that it was connected to the Holocaust, either the Łódź ghetto, Auschwitz, or both, and if I wanted to discover what it was, I should start my search there. I decided to write down everything my mother told me about her

experiences during the Holocaust and everything I could remember about her from my own past, hoping that some clue lay hidden in my memories.

When I started writing, I soon realized how little I actually knew about my mother's past. There were so many questions I couldn't answer. Those questions began to plague my mind to the point that I began to feel as if my entire existence was crumbling around me. I needed to know the secret, even though my brother, my husband and all three of our children kept telling me that I was overreacting, and, whatever the secret might be, it did not change who I was. I wanted to believe they were right, but I had to know.

I shared my worries with my best friend, Ala, who was a Holocaust hidden child. She, too, agreed with my family "Forget it, how is it going to help you? It's your Mother's secret, something she obviously could not share with you while she was alive, so leave it alone now."

That's when the recurring dream began haunting me. A beautiful young woman appears in my bedroom, wearing an alluring red dress, her makeup very overdone. She motions for me to follow her. I find myself in a nightclub filled with men. She points to a chair; I sit down, and, as I make myself comfortable, she takes to the stage. Motioning to the piano player to begin, she takes the microphone in her hand and starts to sing. Her voice is beautiful and the melody is filled with such sadness or, perhaps, longing. I listen intently, but the song is in a language I do not recognize, except for the ending, a phrase in English, repeated over and over again "Secrets, secrets, oh, so many secrets!"

For days on end, the melody, and especially the haunting refrain, *Secrets*, echoed in through my thoughts. It was increasingly hard to concentrate and I kept forgetting where I left my things. One day, while imagining possible scenarios and answers to the secret, I forgot to turn the gas off when I was making dinner and burned it all.

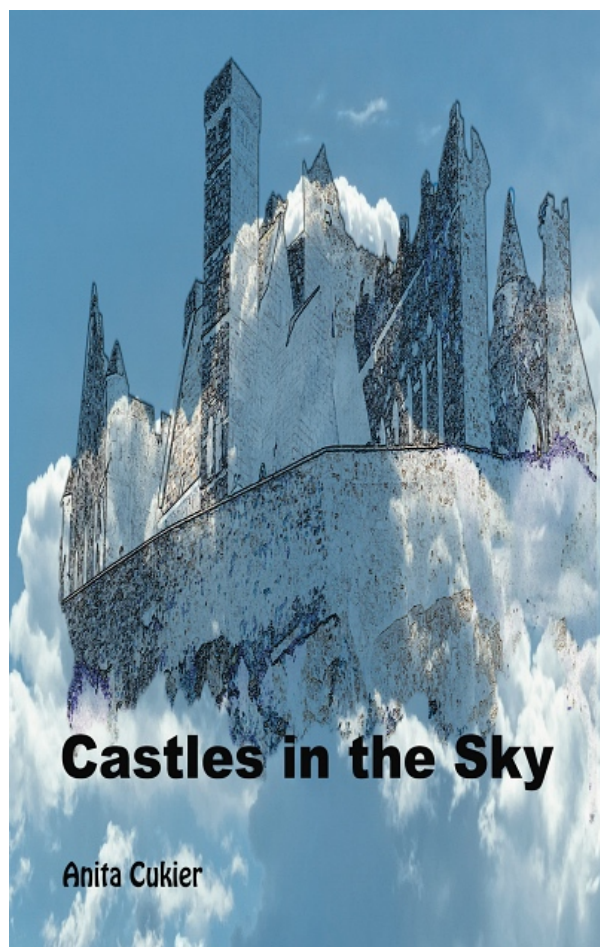
I became convinced that my mother's secret would always haunt me. I had to know what it was and why she withheld it from me. What if there had been clues in front of me all the time, but I just missed them? Or worse still, I was afraid to face them? Is that the real reason I stopped asking questions while Mom was alive, when I still had a chance? Why did it take me years after she passed to really start

searching for what the secret held? Because I suspected that it might be about me? What if I wasn't her child? Or my father's?

I kept reminding myself that whatever I discovered, no matter how shocking, would not change the fact that I have had and still enjoy a good life, and have wonderful children and grandchildren; no revelation from the past could ever change that. As I got deeper into my search, I began to doubt myself. I knew that whatever my parents shared with me might have been obscured by time and trauma and that time has also clouded my own memories. If I could not even be sure of my own memories, how would I even know if anything I discovered was true? I was poring over all the notes I had made since I heard about the secret, when I came across a quote from Elie Wiesel that made me realize that the pursuit of the secret was not the only, and perhaps not the most important, reason to record what I remembered of my parents and my own life:

“I believe firmly and profoundly that whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness, so those who hear us, those who read us must continue to bear witness for us. Until now, they're doing it with us. At a certain point in time, they will do it for all of us.”

Though the secret still occupied my thoughts and guided my search, I told myself that even if I never solved the puzzle of the secret, I would at least give our grandchildren a glimpse into my parents and my own past. When the older ones studied Holocaust at school, they had asked many questions about their great grandparents that I could not answer. I wanted my grandchildren to know more than I did about the family; something I had yearned for throughout my childhood.



Haunted by a lost secret, Anita searches for clues in memories of her childhood and the stories she was told, including her parents' harrowing experiences in Auschwitz.

Castles in the Sky

By Anita Cukier

Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11853.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**