



MORDECHAI ANIELEWICZ CREATIVE ARTS COMPETITION 2021

Prize Winning Writing Entries and Art Prizes List

With appreciation to the teachers and students who participated in this unusual 'pandemic' year.



Jewish Federation
of Greater Philadelphia

Jewish Community Relations Council

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Behind the Walls

In our darkest hours the world feared our pain.

They pretended not to see us
Because they didn't have to be us
So they built walls to hide from their shame.

Behind the walls they built we starved
We lived on food that kept us weak
The taste so bad that many died
because they couldn't eat
And the world watched in silence.

Behind the walls they built we drowned
Never knowing who would meet this death
Shoved into barrels and tubs of water
We watched as friends took their last breath
And the world watched in silence.

Behind the walls they built we burned
Locked in rooms of gas and flames
We walked so blindly into their traps
Stripped of life in a world of pain
And the world watched in silence.

Behind the walls they built we hoped
That soon we would be saved
It was hope that kept us going
Hope that kept the fear at bay
We hoped for the help that came too late.

BANG BANG BANG

Raining hard, can't sleep
BANG BANG BANG

Decades since the war ended
BANG BANG BANG

Still, the memories
BANG BANG BANG

Seeing
terror in people's eyes
BANG BANG BANG

Smelling
gunpowder fired at Nazi soldiers
BANG BANG BANG

Touching
a man as he lay dying
BANG BANG BANG

Tasting
a sense of hope that turned out to be false
BANG BANG BANG

And the most dreaded memory of all
BANG BANG BANG

The Sound
BANG BANG BANG

Oh Lord, that sound
BANG BANG BANG

When I hear it now
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In fireworks going off
BANG BANG BANG

Or tonight's booming thunder
BANG BANG BANG

Horrible flashbacks
BANG BANG BANG

Of waging a battle
BANG BANG BANG

To save a religion
BANG BANG BANG

To save the world
BANG BANG BANG

From the Nazi Devil
BANG BANG BANG

And his demon army
BANG BANG BANG

My best friend, gunned down
BANG BANG BANG

I, lucky to be alive
BANG BANG BANG

Although I have survived the war
BANG BANG BANG

I cannot forget the sound
BANG BANG BANG

Will I Ever Forget

Will I ever forget when they came that first day,
Will I ever forget when we had to stop seeing the rabbi.
Will I ever forget when my family was carted away,
Will I ever forget when people on the streets started to die.
No, I will never forget.

Will I ever forget when they forced us off the train cars,
Will I ever forget when we went through selection.
Will I ever forget when it seemed as though we were behind bars,
Will I ever forget all of our sorrow and depression.
No, I will never forget.

Will I ever forget the long hikes and treks,
Will I ever forget the horrible sleeping conditions.
Will I ever forget the torture to which we were subject,
Will I ever forget all of the causes of afflictions.
No, I will never forget.

Will I ever forget the time we were freed,
Will I ever forget once I had my own might.
Will I ever forget when the Germans did recede,
Will I ever forget when people got back up to fight.

I must always remember these moments,
To make sure that you never forget.

Silenced

Sat in the corner of another's attic,
Silenced.

A girl age 12 was forced to be
Silenced.

The brain still developing but she was
Silenced.

A girl was hidden in an attic because of a religious belief,
Silenced.

With only a journal to speak her mind,
Silenced.

In a tight room with family, but they were all
Silenced.

Her mother who she looked up to sat in the corner weak and
Silenced.

Starving, but she didn't complain because she was
Silenced.

Forced into hiding for their own safety
Silenced.

As if their existence was taken away from them,
Silenced.

Like their voices has disappeared overnight,
Silenced.

Forced into keeping their mouth shut,
Silenced.

They were all
Silenced.

Everyone was
Silenced.

Anyone who cared was
Silenced.

While the rest of the world stayed
Silent.

Nocturne in C# Minor

An abandoned residence.
Field-grey uniform, positioned by the door, questioning.
Jew, fearfully huddled in the corner, answering.
A soldier, a pianist.
A harsh inquiry.
A meek response.
The officer's curiosity is piqued.
It is decided then, the Jew must perform.

He is seated at the bench,
Finger shaking over the keys,
Breathing softly,
Having no time to panic.

His fragile fingers find their place,
On the deserted piano.
He hesitates,
Unsure of where to begin.
Notes spill out carefully,
Timidly.

Haunting music steps into the room.
The pianist reminisces.
Detaching from the present.
Remembering when the world made sense.
Only black and white.
Before everything came crumbling down,
In various greys.

White and black keys,
Clash together.
Creating something
Terribly familiar,
Truly unique.

A German handkerchief appears
He is captivated,
Enchanted by the melancholy sounds.
His past is a heavy weight on his shoulders.
Suffocated by his past mistakes.

4 tearful eyes in the room.
2 beating hearts.
2 racing minds.
1 soulful instrument.

The musician pauses.
Bread passes from strong hands, to trembling ones.

A bond,
Formed.
An understanding,
Reached.

There is not one soldier, and one Jew,
On the opposite sides of the earth.
There is only
One who makes music and one who listens.

Why Did We Let This Happen?

The Holocaust:

A topic that burns one's soul

If not spoken with respect.

Many say,

"Why did we let this happen?"

Or

"I would have stopped him earlier."

The world watched in silence like it was a movie,

Oblivious

To the massacre taking place in Germany in 1941.

I, my gullible self, would also say,

"Why did we let this happen?"

Innocent people taken from their homes,

Like petals plucked from a flower.

6 million people --

It just seems like a number.

But these are,

6 million stories that ended early

6 million cliffhangers,

Where the parts that are written will be

Cherished

And

Retold

Forever.

With a future perspective,

It would "never" happen

Again.

"Morality will surely break the silence."

"How shall one hideous animal

dictate such a large population?"

I think.

And yet I think of -- at this minute --

My own people in

China,

Known for huge factories,

Booming businesses,

High-tech goods,

An internet faster than the speed of light...

But not known for the inhumane crimes on

Uighurs, an innocent Muslim group of about 1 million in Xinjiang.

Those innocent lives are

Caged in concentration camps like dogs,

Forced to work for nothing like machines,

Coerced to eat pork and drink alcohol.
Treated with cruelty,
Their voices and ideas are crushed.
The list
Goes
On.

Their screams demand for help.
The only response is
Deafening silence.

Here I am,
With concern,
“How are we letting this
Happen...?”

A Few Pages

I stared at the words on the page --
Just ink and paper --
Teaching a child about the horrors
Of days not long since passed.

One chapter, a few pages,
The textbook held both atrocities and humanity with both hands
Leaving no hand to hold mine as I fell
Past the words and photos that I could barely stand to look at.

But how could I look away?
*From 1933 to 1945, the Nazis prosecuted and murdered--
Some 6 million Jews and 11 million others--
Pictured above: A photo of an unknown survivor (she didn't look alive to me).*

The horrors clung to the faithful
As the faithful clung to prayers,
But their cries fell on deaf ears for too long.
Still, I stared at the page.

Maybe if I looked long enough
The words would erase themselves—
But my pleas weren't answered,
And it's too late for my prayers anyway.

There are some concepts a child
Simply can't understand,
Like the infinity of space
Or 11 million dead.

Either way, I couldn't come close to comprehension;
Either way, I knew they were a lot,
A lot. A number. Words on a page --
Is this all that these people were reduced to?

I could remember them,
And when "never forget" is being forgotten,
I could say something, do something,
Make sure it doesn't happen again.

The rustle of paper around me brought me back to earth;
My feet touched solid ground again.
The class was almost over
Brring.

The bell rang.
My feet were numb, my head was spinning.
Frozen as the world resumed around me, unable to move,
I stared blankly at the page below me.

Birds

Birds fly high above me; they follow their path in the sky.
The hard-cobbled path is my future, my road to death.
They fly without limitations,
Without restrictions, and dimensional barriers.
While I am confined to my assigned path,
A confined flight.

I serve a purpose to the camps no longer.
My starved body can barely carry itself, let alone the piles of metal,
Those hard and cold pieces of metal
Which uncomfortably rub against my skin.
My stolen teeth gone from my body,
Leaving pain in the gums they once filled,
Too much pain to eat my rations.

I inch closer to my near future, near death.
I see newcomers.
My, how their minds must be so free,
Free like the path the birds above are following,
At least, comparatively so to mine.
They have been through so much already,
But have not yet experienced the haunting of these horrors.
Day and night, reliving every detail down to the bone,
Including the daily cries and prayers for help.
But what's even worse is the silence,
When everyone has given up,
When their lack of hope in God
Results in the loss of their wings.

Those who are still as faithful,
Faithful as they were before they came to the camps, are lucky
For they can still fly away.
Their hope lifts their feathers.

If I were a bird my wings would be clipped,
Clipped by those who have imprisoned and caged me.
I no longer have the privilege of flying away, for I have given up my faith.

I look up once more to the birds,
The birds with enchanting blue wings,
Blue wings that shimmer in the sun and have black edges.
I listen to their chirps, high-pitched but still lovely.
Their chirps sing songs of prayer.

They are going home,
Home to their nests and communities.
Their homes with a synagogue, and the comforting words within the Torah.
Along with bright smiles from their friends.
But it's time to fly away from this home.
It's time to create a new nest elsewhere.

It's too late for me,
Too late for us all.

But go, fly, little birds,
Away from this path of torment.
The camps are no place for anyone.
So fly away from this country,
Before it's too late.

Forever Grateful

The sky was clear and wore a bright shade of blue. The golden light of the sun rained down on the tree tops covering the surrounding land in a warm glow. Birds whistled their songs whilst dancing among the vivid shades of green leaves still covered in morning dew. The red and orange flowers were leaping out of bushes basking in the morning rays. I love German summer days like these, the golden sun kissing my skin and the cool breeze brushing my cheek.

I slipped into the house - box in my tote bag - and scurried upstairs to my bedroom. I rested the thrifted, antique box on the white duvet of my rickety wooden bed and flipped open the gold clasps. I was not met by an empty, wood interior or a velvet lining as I had imagined when I first saw it at the market. No, it was nothing of sorts. Inside laid paper letters, one on top of another, filling the box. The paper was crumpled and discolored as if it has been sitting in the box for many long years. I was simply astonished at the sight in front of me. I sat stationary on my bed, eyes locked on the box of old letters. Curiously, I reached out to pick up a thin piece of yellow-tinted paper and began to read the ornate, fine cursive that filled the page.

August 8, 1941

Days in the camps are so dismal and dreary. Everywhere I turn, incapable and feeble souls are dumped out of lorries and stripped of everything they once knew of their erstwhile lives. The immoral actions that go on inside these deadly walls is nothing I would have ever wished to see, let alone be a part of. I wake up to see families divided to the left or right, their prized possessions torn from their trembling hands, and the look of dread on their dirty faces as they walk to their death. Yes, I am here in Auschwitz-Birkenau - the place of death for Jewish and other "undesirable" individuals - yes, I am a Nazi Soldier working under Adolf Hitler, and yes, I detest every second of it.

August 12, 1941

The temperature had to have been 20°C today - most lovely weather, even under the weight of my uniform. The sky was blue and if there were flowers, they would be dancing under the glow of the warm sun. However, the prisoners of Auschwitz were not celebrating the wonderful, late summer weather. In fact, I can't imagine any of them could pay any mind to it. In their eyes, today - like every other - was sunless, with shadowy and ominous clouds that cover the sky in a dark gray haze. The air reeked of burning flesh and misery. There were no dancing flowers; instead, nothing but shriveled and brittle needles that twitched lifelessly on the skeleton of a deceased spruce tree. If things were different, they all would be on the beach lounging in the sun, flying kites in the park, or laughing over a game of cards on the front porch. Everyone would be with their families; they would be happy.

So would I.

August 14, 1941

My darling daughter Rachel passed away from an unknown health condition after only being on this Earth for two months. I was not there at her birth nor her death - the most important events in one's lifetime. I barely even got to see her face. She would be six years old this October and I would have thrown her the best birthday a little girl could ever want. Of course, I wish my little angel could be here with me, but I would hate for her to see the man I've become. I don't want her to know that her papa is on the side of hatred and violence, that he wakes up every day to

watch people suffer and die without their families by their side. I would have wanted to be the papa that she looked up to as a kind soul with love for everyone. Sometimes I make myself believe that I lost my daughter because I contribute to the hundreds of children torn from the arms of their parents. It's hard to live with that idea hanging over my head.

August 16, 1941

I found a decorative box today amongst the pile of property that once belonged to the prisoners. It was an ashy-brown mahogany box with the daintiest hand carved engravings sprawled on the top. The edges of the lid had a lovely line of shiny pearls and the box was held together with shiny gold clasps. I found it beautiful. Although it was most likely a prized possession of one of the prisoners, I knew it would never make its way back to them so might as well put it to good use. I stowed away the box in my canvas rucksack to be as discreet as possible when I went back to my post. I will store the letters I write in the box for safekeeping.

August 17, 1941

The tear-stained faces covered in filth that walk through the front gates all start to look the same. They are all filled with dread and with the life completely sucked out of them, leaving only a shell. The "human" is long gone. My job in the camp is to monitor the prisoners and make sure they arrive in their assigned quarters. I'm not going to say I have a good job, but at least I have a job that doesn't directly involve the killing or abusing of people.

August 20, 1941

Today, a small girl in a bright pink dress with a brown corduroy coat came plodding into the camp. She looked to be the age of nine or ten and had her blonde hair pulled into a sloppy braid. She came unaccompanied by any family members and looked terrified. Something about her was different, though. She still looked "human"; her life was not gone. I approached her and gently asked for her name. She stared back at me, blue eyes transfixed in fear. She replied after some time with a hesitant voice. "My name is Adela." What a beautiful name.

August 21, 1941

Adela was appointed to the 6523 barrack, which is the large brick building by the entrance. She is on the extermination list due to her age and inability to do labor-intensive tasks; however, she would be relatively safe for the next few days. There are nineteen gas chambers running all throughout the day and into the night but there are still too many people to exterminate all at once. There is a waiting list - possibly the worst waiting list to have your name on - and Adela is somewhere on it. I believe she knows I want to help her, although I have not directly told her. It's not exactly acceptable to interact with the prisoners, let alone help them escape. I saw her by the fence earlier this morning, drawing shapes in the dirt and picking at the weeds growing sporadically. She looked content with her activity, quite content indeed. I wanted so badly to go up and play with her because although satisfied, she looked lonely. I would love to teach her to make flower crowns and bracelets. I used to love sitting in the fields with my sister when we were young, making them with the smallest of white and yellow flowers. Ah, how I wish I could go back.

August 23, 1941

After the sun descended beyond the tree tops, I slipped into barrack 6523 and gifted Adela my leftover rations of the day. I wanted to make sure she is fed and strong enough to fend for herself if she makes it out. The food isn't much - half a slice of bread, a small cup of soup, and a tin cup of water - but it's better than the bare minimum she is fed. I could tell she was very appreciative by the way her mouth was already full of food before she could say a word. She and the rest of the prisoners must be so dehydrated and hungry. They have to be so unbelievably miserable. I wish I could do more. I wish I could get her some toys or books and a new outfit to replace her worn and stained dress. I wish I could make her feel loved and cared for but unfortunately, I can't and that hurts me.

August 24, 1941

I didn't see Adela this morning. I worried at first, but I knew I had to stay focused. I waited until after sunset to visit her bunk in the barrack. I was preparing myself to see her gone and her bed replaced but she was there. Not looking well, but she was there. Her body was stiff and skinny. I placed my hand on her head and felt her freezing cold skin. I stared at this fragile being in front of me and felt helpless. I vowed to myself that I would keep this precious girl alive but she sits on the edge of death. I rushed to find some leftover food and water, in hopes she just needed some fuel. My heart was beating a million times an hour and my breath was shaky. There were some pots of leftover stew in the kitchen and luckily, I saved some bread from my meal. I poured my canteen up with tap water and headed back to the barrack. Gently, I lifted her up and propped her limp body against the wall. Her eyes opened and I began to offer her the miniscule amount of food I managed to retrieve. She took the bowl and piece of bread and began to eat. She is alive and eating and that's all I can ask for.

August 25, 1941

I prayed all last night to see that blonde little girl playing in the dirt and weeds again. To my surprise, I saw her crouched in her spot by the fence playing around with the pebbles. I can't even describe the joy I felt to see her up and moving again. It was the most beautiful and comforting thing I have experienced in a long while. She scanned the area until she caught my gaze. Her resting lips curved into the widest most beaming smile I had ever seen. She looked me in the eyes and did a brisk little wave. I read the mouthing of silent words that slowly slipped through her mouth, "Thank You."

August 27, 1941

Today was the day. Adela was gone. I don't know where she went, whether she escaped or died. I can only hope that she made it; that she had the strength she needed to escape and find relief. I will always have a special place in my heart for you, Adela angle. I will never forget you.

And that was it. The last letter. My brain can't fully interpret the priceless pieces of pure human emotion that I had the privilege of reading. It was beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I rushed to find Oma and show her the letters. After reading them, she looked at me and simply smiled. "Follow me," she said. She drove me into town and parked in front of a historic brick building. We walked in through the large double doors, and Oma led me to this silver plaque. Adela Müller - Holocaust Survivor. May 3, 1931 - August 27, 2014. "I owe my life - my entire life - to the Nazi soldier who helped me heal and escape the deadly walls of Auschwitz. I made it because of him and for that, I am forever grateful."

The Oakmen

The streets of Bergen were cold and unwelcoming, which was strange to Aleksander, who, not two years earlier, was running through these very roads beside the river in the rain with his friends toward his house as the sun set behind it. It was a quaint little house, light blue with yellow and white flowers in the window boxes, settled between two others that looked exactly like it. It was right on the river; Aleksander would watch the boats come in and out of the fjord from his bedroom.

One day they had to leave that house, but no one told him why.

Mamma had come into his room after school that day and told him to take his school bag and put as many toys, books, and clothes in it as he could fit. Then they, along with Pappa and Cathrine, had walked the few blocks down to the Pederson's bookshop. Mamma had been friends with Mr. Pederson since they met in barneskole, and they had always gone out on Sundays together. They had gone into the basement of the shop, and Mamma said that they were going to stay there for a while.

Now, some days later, Aleksander ran around the main room, playing with the wooden man that Morfar had carved for him when he was born. He ran in between tall towers of boxes, some empty, others filled with books, small decorations, and the like. He was immersed in his game when a voice snapped him out of his trance.

"Aleksander?"

He looked up, seeing his sister and mother standing to the side of one of the towers. Mamma whispered "They're coming today, keep him busy," to her before going to their father by the door. Mamma looked a little scared, while Pappa tried to hold a stone-faced expression, but the fear in his eyes gave him away. They were whispering and Pappa held a piece of paper, words covering more than half of it, with a symbol stamped on the bottom. Aleksander assumed that they were probably talking about something called *taxes* that he knew of but was still too young to fully understand. His parents were always upset about taxes.

He looked back at his sister, who was now standing inside the ring of cardboard pillars. Cathrine looked tired, her hair a mess, unbrushed despite it being well into the morning. "What are you doing?" Cathrine asked.

"Playing with Mr. Olsen, see?" He held up the wooden toy. "But I'm getting a little bored of it. He's been climbing these mountains since breakfast." Cardboard mountains, he meant - the boxes.

Her eyes darted toward the door quickly before settling back on Aleksander, a smile forming on her face, but it didn't reach her eyes. "How about I tell you a story, then?" Aleksander nodded, putting the figure into his pocket, grabbing Cathrine's hand as she held it out for him, glancing over at their mother. "We have to go to the other room so we don't disturb Mamma and Pappa, okay?"

He nodded again, standing up and following her to her makeshift bedroom - one of two rooms connected to the main room, the other being a tiny washroom. Her quarters were small, since

the room had originally been a storage closet, but it was enough to fit her bed, desk, and chair. Her desk had a stack of textbooks for her studies, loose papers, and a glass of water. Aleksander jumped eagerly onto the bed as Cathrine pulled the door, which had a large, empty chest of drawers on rollers attached to the outside, and which fit almost undetectably into the wall behind them, closed. She sat down at her desk.

“Is this going to be like one of the stories that Farmor would tell?” Aleksander asked, excited. “Like the ones about the man with the pet monkey that lived next door?”

Cathrine laughed out loud at the thought of the silly, funny monkey story before stopping abruptly and going dead silent, her eyes darting back to the door as if she were listening for something, waiting. When she spoke again, her voice was quieter and Aleksander noticed it sounded a little shaky, but that must just have been because she wanted to come up with the greatest story ever and was under a lot of pressure from that responsibility. “No, but you’ll have to be quiet so that you can hear the story, okay?”

He nodded, grabbing the blanket that rested on the end of her back and wrapping it around his shoulders, dropping the toy on the bed as he did so. She stared at the small wooden man for a few seconds, took a breath, and began her tale.

“Once upon a time, in between two tall mountains, there was a small town. In this small town, there was a boy whose name was Erik. Erik lived with his family and his cat, Lilje, in a little house on the corner of two streets. He thought he lived in the best house in town, right in the center. He was two blocks away from where he went to barneskole, three blocks away from the bakery that his friend’s family owned, and two blocks from the small river that ran beside the mountains. One day, when he was walking down the street to the market with his storebror, Kristian, and his lillesøster, Anette, he heard a loud rumbling sound come from behind them. He turned, and, awestruck, stood frozen as a massive wooden hand grabbed at the mountain.” Cathrine picked up Aleksander’s small wooden man, gesturing toward its hand before continuing. “Erik stopped to watch as a wooden giant pulled itself up and over the mountain, glaring down at the citizens. Everyone scattered in panic as smaller giants, still taller than the buildings of the city, lurched from all directions, some coming from over the mountains, others emerging from the river.”

Aleksander leaned forward, focusing completely on his sister and her tale, his eyes sparkling with interest and excitement. He didn’t even notice the faint yelling outside the basement, muffled by the door and the bookshelf put up to conceal the entrance to the family’s hideaway. Cathrine took a sip of water and proceeded with her story, eyes flitting toward the door every so often, “The giants barreled down the streets in neat lines, nearly squashing people as they ran for cover in their houses. They stomped through the market, stepping on the stalls and baskets, leaving nothing but splinters in their wake, before continuing down into the square. The massive giant, who was clearly in charge of the others, stalked into the square, its footsteps echoing through the valley. It stopped in the center of town, glaring at the gawking citizens. The great being opened its mouth, its voice like thunder as it spoke.

“I am the all-powerful, mighty Oakman, and I am here for your-”

Harsh banging on the front door and loud yelling from outside interrupted the story, stifled slightly by the bedroom door, but still loud enough that the two children could hear it. *Must be the tax man*, he reasoned. Aleksander looked over at his sister, who looked pale and terrified. He

didn't understand why the tax man was so scary, but he assumed it was because they didn't have enough money to pay everything off. Cathrine stood up quickly, not saying a single word, locking the door and moving her desk in front of it. "What are you doing, Cathri-?"

She shushed him, pushing her ear to the door. She turned back to him, her voice shaky and urgent as she spoke. "Stay as quiet as you possibly can, okay? Mamma and Mr. Pederson organized a game of hide and seek for game night tonight, we just forgot to tell you until now. He was just banging on the door to let us know that we should get into our spots, so now we need to make sure they can't find us."

Aleksander scurried under the bed, curling up in the furthest corner, the blankets hanging off the bed and acting as a curtain, hiding him from view. He smiled, excited for the game, as he watched his sister's feet by the door.

Now that he was out of sight, he couldn't see the tears running down Cathrine's face and neck as she tried to suppress her sobs. He couldn't hear her muttering prayers for their parents, her legs unsteady as she heard the front door finally give way. Soon after, the cellar door also crashed open and angry, pounding steps rushed down the stairs. She felt faint. She couldn't breathe; her chest was full of boulders, her heart wrung out. She heard booming voices yell words she didn't understand, but nevertheless knew the meanings of. Tears streamed down her face and she weakly voiced a single, quiet wail before her legs gave out and she slowly collapsed onto her bed. She could hear tables and boxes being overturned, chairs being thrown, shelves falling as the intruders searched every inch of the room. The sound of yelling, sobs, and screams was muffled, but just loud enough for Cathrine to hear with her ear pressed against the door, although Aleksander, tucked beneath the bed, heard nothing. *Thank God*, she thought, barely able to see through the tears in her eyes. As the sound of marching steps faded slowly, leaving the house, Cathrine allowed herself to breathe again.

The main room was dead silent; not a single soul was left.

Her voice was barely more than a whisper as the silent tears continued. "I'm sorry, Mamma. I'm so sorry, Pappa. I promise I'll try to protect Aleksander the way you protected us today. I promise."

She cleared her throat, wiping the tears away from her eyes as she started the story again. She spoke quietly, talking more to herself than her hidden brother.

"The giants tore up the city, ripping roofs off houses, snatching people from their homes as well as the street. They seemed unstoppable. But there were groups of people who formed a Resistance, who fought against these wooden monsters. And, after fighting long and hard, the Oakmen finally fell. People were able to return home, and families were reunited. They had won.

"And so will we."

The Last and Only

Fynn

March 4, 1942, Germany

The staticky buzz of the music program radio made my mind bubble. I recently overheard Mother speaking to Paul about sending me to camp, a boy scout camp for Hitler Youth. Through the bedroom window, I could see the sun trying to seep through the thick, cotton-like fog. This unfortunate day would be an addition to a collection of many. After Paul's marriage, I was the bearer of my parents' expectations. I was bombarded with possibilities of what I should become, because to my parents, I simply was not good enough.

The reality of joining boy scouts would be phenomenally disastrous. I wasn't a soldier. I was tall and scrawny, my limbs like thin tree branches. Unlike Paul, I had no muscles. My hair was mud brown and barely ever sat in a position that was acceptable. My personality was much like my hair. Mother often said that I never helped out, then went ahead to compliment Paul on how helpful he was. My brother took advantage of these supplements to his ego. He would say, "Fynn, I don't live here anymore, you have to help Mother out!" Sometimes he said these exact words; other times he would shame me with others. His strong contempt towards me was why, I am assuming, he convinced my parents to send me to boy scouts.

Amira

June 3, 1943, Poland

I heard a deep rumble outside from an approaching truck. It was them. Alexander wasn't even back yet! "Hide, Ariella!" I whispered as urgently as possible. I saw the dark clouds forming in her eyes; a storm was coming. If she cried now, they would surely find us. Who was I kidding - they were going to find us regardless. I didn't know what to do; Alexander usually did the comforting. "I'm scared," she whispered to me, trying to conceal her sobs. I lifted her tiny body and placed her into the cabinet next to the dresser. I told her to be quiet. The patter of the footfall on the cobblestones made me imagine rain. Rather comforting under most circumstances, but any solace I had was broken when I heard a pound, like a hammer on a nail. Rather peculiar, it was just one pound. In a split second I realized that the pounder wasn't going to wait for me to answer. I used this to my advantage. I opened the mahogany door to the closet. My father built that door, along with every other aspect of this house. It's a shame really, he was such a good father -- when I could call him that. I climbed into the closet and hid behind Mama's furs and dresses. Right when I shut myself in, I heard another loud pound, and then the crash of the splintered front door.

I was praying to a God (if there was one). Maybe they wouldn't find us. I was on the top floor, in Mama's room. I had heard stories of home invasion, but I thought I was safe. I was much better off than most Jews. My house was brick red, right in the middle of a rich neighborhood. It had two stories along with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. I went to a highly respected school. I never had to worry about food, at least not until Father left and Mother died.

Fynn

May 15, 1943, Germany

Though I wasn't surprised, another unfortunate day overcame me. I really didn't think that my parents would send me off to die. The days were becoming longer and warmer and the sun was always shining (literally, at least, because metaphorically, it was always raining in my life). In

family photos, you see Father and Paul in sharp black suits, Mother in a floral dress, and me in the middle ruining the parade that my family had put together. “The Konigs, Paul, and Their Other Son.” I was referred to as their *other* son. I wasn’t even a Konig. Konig means king but I was just a servant. For that reason, I decided to cooperate with Mother’s plan since clearly my current status in life wasn’t doing me any good. Maybe if I was a boy scout in training to be a soldier, I would finally be respected.

Amira

June 3, 1943, Poland

Realization struck me. When Alexander came back from the market, he wouldn’t be able to find us. We were all he had left; he was all we had left.

The stomps of the soldiers came closer. I could hear them climbing the stairs.

Ariella was calling for me. “Amira! Amira! I need to go to the bathroom.” Her voice was raspy from crying.

“You’re going to have to hold it,” I said with more than a touch of desperation. It was clear that she didn’t understand what was going to happen. She thought everything was going to be fine, when we were probably going to die.

I heard a door open. Maybe it was my bedroom door. Mama’s room was farthest from the stairs so maybe they would forget to check. I heard the soldiers running in search.

The closet door flung open.

A soldier, green suited and blue eyed, towered over me. With a gun in his hand, he motioned me to follow him, but I remained frozen. He said “Komme Hier.” I didn’t speak German that well, but I knew what he wanted. He grabbed my shirt, dragging me across the hardwood. A nail sticking out from the floor nicked my calf. My eyes were blinded by tears. I so badly wanted to check on Ariella, but if they didn’t find her, she might live. That’s when I heard her. She had come out of the cupboard. As much as I was upset that she got caught, I was also in that moment angry with her. *Stupid child, couldn’t hold your bladder*, I thought. “Roamer, come get this Jew,” one soldier yelled. Ariella did not resist.

Fynn

May 20, 1943, Poland

My father’s car approached the camp. It rumbled toward the drop off over the uneven road. Many other kids, younger than me even, were getting dropped off. I was nervous and uncertain. A broad-shouldered soldier in a green uniform at the drop-off greeted me, appraised me, and handed me a uniform from a pile on a massive table.

Here, the sun wasn’t even trying to reveal itself. I steadily walked behind the greeter as he showed me to my cabin. We reached a green tent-like construction. The material was a sturdy canvas. In the tiny room, I saw two beds without sheets. That was expected; we were to bring our own. The soldier, whose name I learned was Obergefreiter Wilhelm Roamer, left me to change. While I stripped of my clothing, a boy not much younger came in. I was fretful and felt disrespected, but he didn’t seem to care so I continued with my business. After I changed into the uniform, I decided I would at least try to make friends.

“Hello,” I said with as much assertiveness as I could conjure.

“Wie geht’s!” he responded. He was rather peppy. He had blond hair and ocean- blue eyes that seemed to deepen every minute. I imagine that he was the image that Adolf Hitler had in mind for a perfect German.

“So, what’s your name?” he asked.

“Fynn Konig. Yours?”

“My name is Luka Wagner.”

“How old are you?”

“I am 14.” Fourteen years of age, only two years younger than me. Maybe I actually had a chance at a friend here.

Amira

June 3, 1943, Poland

I hadn’t known how beautiful it was outside. The sun was radiant, glimmering onto the cobblestone streets. The air felt comforting and smelled fragrant, but the beauty outside could not compare to the horror I was feeling. Ariella had started crying and they whipped her. They took a belt and whipped her! The soldier tightened his grip on me when I tried to break free to stop her punishment. “No, stop she’s only five, please!” I screamed. My soft crying turned to convulsive sobs. I couldn’t help her; this was all my fault. Ariella was on the sidewalk, screaming. They weren’t stopping. The soldier started to pull me away. I kept resisting. I couldn’t leave my little sister to be whipped. I struggled but he won. My arms gave out and he dragged me to the truck, throwing me into the back. A moment later Ariella joined me.

She wasn’t moving.

They couldn’t have whipped her to death, could they? I held in the next batch of tears to check if she was breathing. I placed my hand under her nostrils. An invisible weight on my chest lifted as I felt her warm breath on my fingers. I shook her awake. She was okay. She had a few marks on her face and legs but they would heal. I leaned her onto my lap and stroked her hair as the driver started the ignition. I suddenly became aware of the presence of at least four other families crammed onto the truck.

A single word returned to my head:

Alexander.

Fynn

June 3, 1943, Poland

The camp started out like any other summer camp. We learned folktales and songs, we went on hikes and camped outside. As time went on, we learned how to use weapons, we trained for agility, and we read Nazi books.

June 3rd is my birthday. 17 years old. This meant that I would have to join the military because that was the whole point. I didn't realize everything was coming so soon. It had only been one month since I joined the scouts but I was already turning into a Nazi.

The summer days only got longer. The sun was shining almost every day, and there was rarely rain. The camp got easier and easier; I was building muscle and gaining agility. I went from not being able to do a proper sit up to doing 50 in a row. My arms had muscles from doing pull ups every day. I could run as fast as the wind. I would see my parents this afternoon for my birthday. Since I had completed my training, I was a soldier. Instead of joining the military my commander, Wilhelm Roamer, thought I would be better fit to become a guard at Auschwitz, a concentration camp in southern Poland. My parents were thrilled with the idea, which means that I was thrilled too.

Amira

June 3, 1943, Poland

I was looking forward to getting off the truck until I found out that we were being crammed onto a train. The train was far worse than the truck. Instead of four families, there was an uncountable number of people on it.

I couldn't find Alexander's face in the crowd. I remembered the picture I had in my purse, a photo of him. Maybe he hadn't been caught. Maybe I would find him.

The conditions on the cattle car were inhumane. If soldiers heard complaining during the loading process, they would whip the complainers. The train was compacted with people, making it impossible to kneel or sit down. Ariella was having a hard time standing, so I let her lean on me. Though the weight added to my hardship, I wanted her to make it out of this. We didn't get served food or water. By the end of the day-long trip, I was feeling faint. Many vomited. Ariella added to the smell by urinating on me. Honestly, I can't blame her; she held it for as long as she could. The entire journey was quiet. Despite the suffering, no one dared speak.

After many hours on the train, I knew our destination couldn't be that far off. We would soon be somewhere other than this stench-filled box. I wasn't exactly looking forward to the destination, but it would offer some relief, or so I hoped.

Fynn

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

I arrived at Auschwitz the day after my birthday. Obergefreiter Roamer accompanied my father and me on the trip. He was one of the only people that made me feel like I belonged. I was thrilled when I found out he was transferring from the Hitler Youth camp to be a guard at Auschwitz. I was glad that I would actually know someone there.

When we arrived at 6:45 AM, the sky was still dark. The air was cool and refreshing. A new train of Jews was to arrive at 8:00 in the morning. A veteran guard had brought us to our quarters, which was an old house just half a mile from the camp. After I was settled, I headed back to Auschwitz.

The train arrived and the instant the doors opened, any enthusiasm I had about my new job disappeared. I saw nothing to be proud of, just scared and hungry people. Remorse filled my body like water in a bucket. I felt like I was going to be sick. I knew what was eventually going to

happen to all these people. They would either be worked to death, or exterminated. And I would feed their suffering.

Amira

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

The train screeched to a stop and soldiers' barking announced that we had arrived. I could see the arch of the camp. The Nazis got right to work on shooing us out of the train. "Shnell, schnell." they said. I could see bodies collapsed on the floor. Several soldiers checked to see if they were alive; if they were not, the bodies were thrown out by prisoners in striped uniforms. Desperate, air-starved people forced Ariella and me out of the way. I grabbed her hand and pushed my way through the train doors. I breathed in the fresh air and looked over at Ariella. She clearly looked better but she was shivering due to her wet pants. In the distance I saw soldiers directing Jews in different directions. Men were being sent somewhere different from the women. My eyes locked with a soldier, not much older than me. He looked vulnerable, like he was scared. I was dumbfounded. *Why should he be scared?* I thought. Jews were the ones who were suffering.

Fynn

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

My eyes locked with a girl. She looked about my age. My thoughts of remorse were still swirling around in my mind when I noticed her eyes. They were green, not dull, but like two emeralds. She was looking right back at me. Right then Obergefreiter Roamer called me and told me that we were going to direct the new arrival of Jews.

"Why are we doing this?" I asked the commander.

"Doing what?" he replied.

"How could we torture and kill all these people. I just can't understand why, they're human like us!" I said more confidently than I felt. Obergefreiter Roamer's expression suddenly changed to amusement. *Well, I'm glad he finds this funny,* I thought. His expression again changed abruptly, this time to a stupefied look.

"You're serious? Jews are not human. We kill them because they are pests in our society," he said in a stern voice. "I know what will help you understand." Obergefreiter Roamer brought me to the separation line in front of the train. The girl I saw earlier had reached the beginning of it.

"Bring her here," the Obergefreiter demanded. I grabbed hold of the girl. She flinched. I pulled her into a small building with a holding cell near the unloading point, as Roamer said to. A child was clinging to this girl like her tail.

Roamer handed me a whip.

Amira

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

The soldier hesitantly took a hold of the whip. Ariella was still with me. "My God, he's going to whip me," I thought.

“Go on!” the commanding soldier said. I kept quiet. I knew there was no escaping this. I pushed Ariella behind my body so she wouldn’t get hurt again. Before I could protest the whip came down onto my face. It stung. I let out a yelp, tears welled in my eyes. The young soldier looked regretful. I concluded that he was new at this place. The commander clearly looked pleased with what the boy-soldier had done. His face was filled with guilt. The commander motioned for the boy to leave the cell. He moped to the bars of the cell and held it open for the commander. The commander followed and locked the cell behind them. I huddled my body into a ball in the middle of the dark cell. I could imagine the mark that the whip left on my face. I glanced over at Ariella, who looked terrified. I tried to console her, not knowing what good it would do. I pulled Ariella close to me and tried to sleep.

Fynn

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

I walked out of the cell. Obergefreiter Roamer looked at me like I just defeated a lion. I just hurt a helpless girl and he was *proud* of me! I felt horrible, but definitely not worse than the girl. Her smooth, lightly bronzed skin had a streak of bright red.

I did that to her.

The day was ending and it was more climactic than I could have ever imagined. When the sun was starting to set, Roamer and I headed to our quarters, shared with three other soldiers. Though we had met briefly, I couldn’t recall their names. One of the soldiers who arrived home earlier had left a sort of stew on the stove. I grabbed a bowl and ladled food into it.

“So, how did it feel?” Roamer asked. I assumed he was talking about whipping the Jew.

“It felt . . . great!” I said with false enthusiasm. I couldn’t risk building suspicion; I needed as many people on my team as possible. Roamer seemed to believe my spirit.

“Good. Pity is for the weak!” he said, clearly satisfied with me. After I managed to gulp down my food I decided to sneak back to the camp.

I had to help that girl.

I learned how to treat all kinds of injuries at the Boy Scout camp. There wasn’t much I could do to remove a whip welt, but I could help it heal. I needed soap and Epsom salt. I went to the kitchen and found a bar of soap next to the sink. I took a glance at the clock; it was 10:00 PM. I could pretend to be on night duty if I arrived at Auschwitz before 10:30 PM. I had to be quiet because I didn’t have an excuse for what I was planning. I couldn’t find any Epsom salt, but I found a bucket in a cabinet under the sink. I filled it with hot water because there was no hot water at the concentration camp. This trek would be hard but worth it; I was going to right a wrong.

I tiptoed over to the front door. Right then I stepped on a creaky wood board. My body stiffened. What if someone heard? I stood there for another second until I was certain that it was safe to move forward. I reached the door and opened it with a great sense of relief. Horror then filled my body as I saw a soldier walking up the pathway.

“Hello!” he said in a friendly voice. “Night duty?” he questioned, empathizing.

Once again, I felt relief. This soldier hadn’t seen me leaving that morning. I decided to go along with his false story.

"Yes," I said, trying to sound disappointed.

"Okay, see you later." he said, minding his own business. The moon shone on his heavily gelled hair. I gave a quick "Heil Hitler" and went on my way.

Amira

June 4, 1943, Auschwitz

The sound of the outer door opening woke me suddenly. Ariella was still snoring on my lap in the prison cell. I quickly wondered again about Alexander. I heard footsteps but saw nothing in the dark. It took me back to the day we were captured. The person moved closer. Panic fluttered in my chest. What if they were coming to hurt me, or Ariella. I could make out only a silhouette. I slowly inched to the back of the cell, Ariella's body pulled tight to me. The shadow was opening my cell door. I trembled with fear. Ariella was still asleep - good.

The shadow opened the door to the cell quietly. I saw that it was the boy from earlier. Was he here to whip me again?

"Are you okay?" he asked. It was funny - he sounded genuinely concerned.

I snorted. "Am I okay? I don't know, why did you whip me? I didn't do anything wrong!" I was really taking a risk here, talking back to a soldier. His expression changed to shame.

"I'm really sorry about that, I'm here to make it up to you!" he said apologetically.

"What?" I was astonished; he was actually sorry. "I don't understand, you know that I am a Jew, right?" The average Nazi treated Jews like rubbish.

The soldier shook his head. "I don't agree with what they are doing, the Nazis. I didn't want to hurt you. I just had no choice."

With this, anger filled me, "Actually, you did have a choice, you could have not whipped me!"

"I really am sorry. I brought water and soap to help it heal." The boy stepped into the moonlight sneaking in from the open door. I saw his olive complexion shine in it. His hair was messy and brown.

"By the way, my name is Fynn, Fynn Konig. What's your name?"

"Amira," I responded.

"That's a beautiful name."

"Ach! I forgot a washcloth," he said. "Is it okay if I use my hand?" he asked.

"I guess." He dipped the bar of soap into the bucket and lathered it. He brought his hand to the welt and lightly touched it. I flinched; it stung at first, but then I felt instant relief.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

Fynn

June 5, 1943, Auschwitz

Yesterday, the guard at Auschwitz let me in, and didn't have a doubt in the world that I wasn't there for a night shift. The only downside was that I had to stay the night so that people wouldn't question me. After I helped Amira, I asked if I could stay. Her sister, Ariella, was asleep while everything was going on. I soon fell asleep too, on the floor, a short distance away from where Amira was. I awoke to the rattling of keys. I immediately got up and fixed my uniform. I glanced over at Amira; she was still asleep. She looked exhausted. Her little sister leaned on her, using her body as a pillow. I felt terrible locking them in but I had no choice.

I thought back to what Amira had said the night before. “You did have a choice.” I locked the cell just the same, and just in time.

Obergefreiter Roamer strode into the building. He looked startled to see me. “Fynn, what are you doing here so early?” he questioned.

“I just wanted to be early on my first official day!” I lied. He seemed to believe me.

“These two didn't go with the rest of the group to get assigned to their barracks because of your little demonstration yesterday. Can I trust you to put them through the processing?” Roamer asked.

“Yes, sir!” I responded.

I went into the cell and tapped Amira's shoulder to wake her up. “You must come with me now.” She carefully picked up her sister, who was still asleep.

As we exited the small building she asked, “Where are you taking us?”

“To be processed,” I responded. “I can make sure that you are with your sister in the same barracks in the Bla sector.”

After I dropped them off, Amira and I exchanged a long look, and I left. I hoped this wouldn't be the last I saw of her.

Amira

August 21, 1943, Auschwitz

A few months have gone by. Fynn offers help when he can. Sometimes he smuggles us an extra piece of bread or a potato. He treats us with kindness, like he cares about us. I still haven't heard anything about Alexander despite asking all the female prisoners if they had seen him on their train ride. My worry grows stronger each day. What if he was taken from us like Mother? He certainly wouldn't ever leave us like Father did. My dad left us on a perfectly normal day, except it wasn't a normal day.

Two years ago, on Ariella's third birthday, I went into my father's room to ask about her party. All his things were packed, and I wondered where he was going. Then I thought, “Oh, no, we are moving.” I desperately did not want to leave my home. This is where I grew up, with Mother and

Father and my friends. I later learned that Father talked to Alexander before he left. He told him that he would be back the next day. I believed him. At that time I was 14. I can't believe I was stupid enough to believe him. Alex was lying; father had told him that he was to take care of us. *You can't have children and then abandon them.* That was my thought every time I thought of Father but I can't blame him for leaving. After mother died of typhus, Father changed. He wasn't happy, so I'd like to think that I would forgive him if I ever saw him again.

All this came pouring out when I asked Fynn to see if anyone had seen or heard of Alexander.

I just couldn't lose someone else.

Fynn

August 22, 1943, Auchswitz

I am attracted to Amira. Not just as a friend. It's not just her ethereal beauty. She's charming, forgiving, caring. She puts her little sister first - always.

The other day during Appell, I saw Ariella shivering. I snuck some blankets to them in their barracks a few days later. Amira took her own blanket and wrapped it around Ariella and smiled at me gratefully.

I decided that after everything Amira has lost, the least I could do was put out word for Alexander. Amira had a picture that she kept in the shirt she first wore here. She took it and hid it away in her striped uniform. She gave me the picture and I made it my greatest priority to find him. I would use not only the picture, but I would also check the camp roll to see if he was or had been here. There was little chance that he was, and I was sure to let her know of that, but it couldn't hurt to try.

Amira

August 31, 1943, Auschwitz

Fynn informed me that he found Alexander.

He was in the men's barracks. Alive. For now. He was strong, but it was only a matter of time before Auschwitz claimed him. No way for me to see him, hug him, talk to him.

I am becoming more and more strongly attracted to Fynn. I know that sounds crazy; he's a Nazi. But while he wears the Nazi uniform, he doesn't have a Nazi heart. He's helped me through everything, whether it's the extra food or the extra blankets. Of course, he does it all in secret because if anyone found out we could both be killed.

I can't imagine what Fynn sees in me. I feel ugly. My luscious brown hair has been shaved off. I am tattooed and no more than a number to the Nazis. When he looks at me, however, I feel nothing but beautiful.

I am getting skinnier and weaker by the day. I give any extra rations to Ariella. I am hungry, starving, even with the extra food that Fynn gives me.

Fynn

September 3, 1943, Auschwitz

It hurts me to know that Amira and Ariella have to work so hard every day. They have to dig holes and move rocks, it is horrible, cruel. Everyone was suffering, *Amira* was suffering.

But her greatest suffering came one tragic morning.

It is my habit to watch Appell for Amira's barracks in the morning. That day I noticed that Ariella wasn't with her. Amira looked pale and teary. After the roll call, I went to the soldier in charge and said that I been instructed to take Amira to a different work assignment. We walked part of the way across the camp and then ducked behind a storage shed. "What happened?" I asked her, my hands on her shoulders.

Immediately, her composure broke down. "Ariella, she wasn't moving. In the morning I woke up and when I tried to wake her, she was motionless." Amira was rambling through her sobs, realizing that what she was saying was real. Ariella was dead. She leaned against the shed and slid her body against the wall to the ground. She was crouched on the dirt, her hands over her eyes. I sat next to her.

"It's going to be fine," I said, even though I knew it wouldn't.

"It's not, I need her!" She looked at me, her sobs momentarily stopped. She was desperate for some consolation. I didn't know what I could say to help her. I reached out and grabbed her hand. Her fingers were soft. I gripped her hand tightly and gave it a comforting squeeze. She leaned her head to my shoulder. We sat like that for some time.

Amira

October 2, 1943, Auschwitz

I lost them all. Ariella and Mother, both dead. I will probably never see Father or Alexander again. I'm clueless as to what to do. I spend my days working.

Fynn

October 31, 1943, Auschwitz

Amira thinks she's lost everyone, but she has me. Why can't she see that?

I found out that many of the women in Amira's barracks are getting gassed.

Including her.

No. No. No.

I don't want to lose Amira. I cannot!

Maybe I don't have to.

An idea formed in my mind. I went to the men's sector of Auschwitz. I watched to see if I could find Amira's brother during Appell. As I was about to give up, I caught a glimpse of a young man, a little taller than me. He was the spitting image of Amira. I glanced at the picture cupped in my hand, then back at him. It was Alexander. When the Appell was finished I pulled him aside behind a barrack.

“You must pretend that I’m questioning you and look intimidated,” I instructed. “I know your sisters Amira and Ariella. I am very sorry that you had to find out this way, but Ariella did not survive.” Alexander's confused eyes filled with pools of tears.

“How do you know them? Aren’t you a soldier here? Is Amira alive?” he asked.

“That’s what I’m here to talk to you about. Amira’s getting sent to the gas chambers. She doesn’t know. I won’t be able to save her, but I might be able to help you. We’ll meet here tonight at 11:00 PM.”

“What do you mean you can’t help her? You have to do something!” He yelled in a hushed tone.

“Don’t you think I would help her if I could?” I snapped back. All I *wanted* was to help Amira.

In his frustrated voice he managed to ask “What’s your plan?” Good, he was hooked.

“You don’t need to know that part yet.” I said.

“Why would you help me?” Alexander asked.

“Please, don’t ask questions. Just be here.”

He didn’t know that I wasn’t doing this just for him.

Amira

November 1, 1943, Auschwitz

The soldiers are taking us to showers. After everything, all I needed was a shower.

Fynn

October 31, 1943, Auschwitz

Since I was on night duty, I had no problem meeting Alexander behind the barracks. I brought my extra uniform for Alexander and a wet cloth to clean him up. I went to the planned spot and Alexander was already there.

I gave a small nod.

“Hello,” he responded.

“I brought you one of my spare uniforms. Put this on and give me your striped pajamas,” I said.

He silently began to remove his clothing. I helped him suit up and wiped any visible dirt off of his face and neck. He looked like a real soldier.

“Now you have to follow me. We have to leave together and then you can go wherever you want. Don’t act suspicious or stare at anyone,” I said in a rush. We both strode at a steady pace to the front, pretending to engage in casual conversation. No one gave us a second look. We were out and Alexander would be safe, for now.

We head a little further from the camp to a large oak tree. Underneath the fallen dead leaves at the base of the trunk I had hidden a parcel of food and some civilian clothes.

"I brought you this package," I said, looking around to make sure no one was watching. "You have to head east. There is no guarantee you'll be safe, but you have a chance," I said. We exchanged glances.

"Thank you, really. Tell my sister-"

"I'll tell her," I said before he could finish.

We shook hands and parted ways.

The next morning, I put the prisoner pajamas under my uniform. I also brought a razor and scissors in a satchel. After I got to Auschwitz, I went to the area of the gas chambers. When no one was watching, I slipped behind a shed. I pulled off my uniform and took out the scissors and razor in a hurry.

I brushed my fingers through my hair, took a piece of it in my hand and brought the scissors to it. The first snip was the hardest. After I cut the top portion off, I took the razor and shaved off any remaining hair. I looked like a prisoner now.

I knew what I was getting myself into. I also knew that my life wasn't a total waste. I only ever lived for my parents. Finally, I would be doing something to make me feel worthy in my own eyes. Whatever happened to pleasing my parents, right? If I could say anything to them now I would tell them that they can go to hell for all I care!

I hid, waiting to find Amira. I looked around hoping to see her face. There she was, waiting in a line.

Amira

November 1, 1943, Auschwitz

At first, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. No, it was Fynn. Even without his hair he was distinctly noticeable. He was a shining star even with his head shaved smooth. I saw him run to the back of the line. I was almost at the beginning. When the soldiers let me in I saw that the showering room was small, with just four walls. It had little knobs on the roof, which was probably where the water came from. I looked around to see whether Fynn was inside yet.

Fynn

November 1, 1943, Auschwitz

I was the last person in the line. After I entered, the soldiers shut the door of the cramped room. *No better time than the present*, I thought. I pushed my way through the people to find her. There she was, I walked up to her, and took hold of her hand. I gripped it tight.

"Alexander is safe," I said. She needed to know that there would be someone to carry on her family name.

"What do you mean he's-"

I cut her off.

“Just trust me, he is safe. He wanted me to tell you that he loves you.”

Now it was time for the hard part. “By the way, I don’t know if you knew this, but I think I’m in love with you.” I said. Her colorless face brightened. She started to smile, the first genuine smile I had seen since Ariella died.

“What?” She said, not expecting those words. “Why are you telling me this right now? Why are you in here in the first place? You’re not a Jew. I don’t understand, you’re a soldier, why are you showering with us?” I had forgotten, she didn’t know what was going to happen.

All of a sudden, I felt light-headed, like I was breathing something other than oxygen. It was happening. I brought my hands up to her chin and pulled her towards me.

Amira

November 1, 1943, Auschwitz

I felt electricity between us. It was something I had never felt before. He kissed me! His confidence was unexpected.

I felt a wave of weakness. For some reason my vision was going dark. I had to tell him.

“I think I’m in love with you, too,” I said, holding his hand in mine.

Escape

“Wake up. Wake up. WAKE UP!!!”

My father shook me awake as I lay on the dirt floor. When I finally awoke, I found myself in a place that I had seen before, in the nightmares that plagued me night after night. This was a Nazi concentration camp. I was surrounded by my family, who all were wearing dirty, mud-covered white and black striped clothing with a number printed right where the breast pocket would have been. Everything was still in a blur just as I woke up and saw the hundreds, maybe thousands of people wander their way through the camp on my first day. Dazed and confused, all I could think of was my father telling me to run as I saw my family, no, my life ripped away from me by the Nazi soldiers that had carried us away. I couldn't run away and know I'm here, in this abysmal place where they take the so-called “Filthy Jews.” When I grasped where I was, all I could focus my attention on was the people making their way in and out of gas chambers, going in, but not coming out. Tears began to fill my eyes as I knew my chances of making it out of this place were slim to none.

I arrived here on the 17th of October in 1942.

I was 15 when I saw everything I loved taken away from me. My family consisted of my mother, Adela; my father Aleksander; my sister, Lena; and me, Tomasz. We lived a good life in Bialystok, but when we caught wind of the Nazis invading we hid in our house, trying to leave no sign of life as to make it seem we were long gone. Then came the fateful day a Nazi soldier found us hidden in the attic crawlspace. He slowly walked up the stairs to the crawlspace and my body froze. His sly head began to peek over the entryway with those horrible, horrible eyes. To me, those eyes were of a snake, with shallow slits instead of pupils; there might just as well have been a forked tongue slithering in and out of his mouth. He found us and kicked my father to his knees while threatening him with the Mauser pistol in his hand, eventually forcing his hands behind his back. The trooper screamed, “Stehen bleiben!!!” My mother and sister were screaming and kicking, both of them terrified beyond belief. I stood frozen, lifeless as a rock, then I snapped back to the horrible reality around me and heard my father's voice screaming, “Run, get as far away from here as you can, and don't let them catch you,” but I couldn't get away. The instant I began to run, more Nazis flooded through the entryway after hearing the commotion inside. I was grabbed as I was finally making it back down the stairs. I was herded onto a small truck along with the rest of my family and taken to a train along the railway that used to be bustling with life before the war. From there we were taken to the concentration camp

Treblinka II. When I arrived, I passed out in pure shock of the utterly depressing, lifeless camp.

I looked around, half expecting to wake up from a horrible nightmare, yet it was the same terrifying scene. As I stood up, cold in the crisp October air, I saw that I had been dressed in the same striped outfit as the rest of my family. It was when I had first arrived that I had received my outfit and my own personal number. They call it a camp, but with these striped uniforms everyone was well aware that this was a prison, a prison for the innocent, a prison for Jews.

One Week Later

My first week was bearable, with the stale dry bread, bland vegetable soup and the grimy water. Life went on as I was still getting used to what would become normal for the following five months. At the end of that first week, all of note was that I had found someone to talk to in the form of a boy a few years younger than me named Aleksey. I found comfort in talking to him, and he became the light and the end of the tunnel as he felt like a younger brother that I could take care of. Every day was the same one after another, and the only bright spot was when I was able to have a conversation with Aleksey. His bright gleaming eyes absolutely brimming with hope began to fill me with the will to keep on making it through every day.

As the weeks went by all seemed normal for the most part; every day I was put into forced labor, helping in the production of armaments for the army of Nazi Germany. The future seemed bleak as I witnessed countless horrors before my own eyes. In my second week of work I saw a man refuse to take part in the labor; they beat him down until he lay defeated on the stone floor then proceeded to take him away to what I hope was solitary confinement. I eventually did see that man making his way through the camp again, but I never saw him try to resist again, possibly from the fear of death. Day in and day out, I worked hard assembling various weapons under the fear that I too may be taken away. The labor of those younger than me was less harsh, but it was still labor. Aleksey was forced to contribute to counterfeiting money which was not directly making weapons for the Nazis, but it was still helping them. My clothing had become dingy and brown from the seemingly endless work.

Two Weeks Later

The days now seemed dreary as my body had now finally become like to the rest of the prisoners here: skinny, frail and hungry. The food we have been served is enough to keep us alive, but not enough to keep us healthy.

My father was selected by the Nazis to take a "shower." On that day it seemed as if all hope were lost. My family had finally been broken beyond repair. He could not be replaced as he is, was, and would be the only father I would ever have.

Three Months In

It has been three months since the day my father passed and from that day on nothing seemed out of the ordinary (if you can even call life in a concentration camp ordinary). Talks of rioting against the SS and the Nazis swirled among many of us; this was due to the desperate fear that many or most of us would not make it out of here alive. The numbers of prisoners within this camp had started to dwindle, yet new prisoners had been arriving in troves, keeping the camp sickeningly plump, full of lambs to the slaughter.

Not even a few months after our arrival the rest of my family began to become faces in the fray of prisoners plugging the extermination camp known as Treblinka II.

Six Months In

Time began to fly by as we had been kept busy by the manual labor of the camp. It had already become August with the passing summer becoming a burden of work rather than a time of joy.

The talks of revolt had reached all-time highs, with prisoners planning to fight back tomorrow, the second day of August. I had quickly become one for this idea as any hope of escaping was hope nonetheless and that was all I needed. We were aware after hearing discussions among guards that no deportations or gassings were to commence tomorrow. This would give us the opportunity to seize weapons from the armory as we would have as many people available as possible. We were entirely organized and ready to attempt the escape from this harrowing place.

One Day Later, Early Morning

Today is the day. We will revolt and we will make it out. All of us have done our best to keep our scheme a secret from those who could lead on our captors or our captors themselves. My spirits are at an all-time high despite the grayish atmosphere, I am in awe of the fact that I could even have a chance to escape.

Later That Day, In the Woods Outside Camp

We were heading towards the armory, but when we arrived, unbeknownst to us, the Nazis had caught wind of our scheme and had been there in wait for us. We quickly dashed for the weapons as the guards had gunned and taken down many of the prisoners going for the large number of weapons in an attempt to hold us back, yet some of us were able to grab weapons and take down the three Nazis, allowing more to get weapons.

As a group we made our way to the central doors of the camp and stormed through, taking down all SS in our way. Reinforcements of Nazis began to swarm.

I ran for my life.

Epilogue

Of those who revolted, only three hundred made it out of the camp. I was one of those. The three hundred that made it out sprinted into the forest for refuge. The Nazi forces came after us, quickly taking down many with their superior weapons and fighting knowledge. In the following weeks, two thirds of those who made it out had been recaptured or killed. The rest, like me, survived to start a new life.

I had to leave my mother and sister behind. I see their faces and hear their voices every day. I am older now and the events that occurred within the walls of Treblinka II shaped the rest of my life through the way I see others and the way I appreciate the life that I am given. That time still haunts my memories, yet I am grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences and the hardships in the hopes that they will never happen to anyone else again.

Concentration

I was 14 in 1939, when I was taken to a ghetto by the Nazis after their invasion of Poland. In 1940, I was taken to the concentration camp, Aushchwitz. I hear of horrible things that happen every day in these camps, but when I got there, all I saw was dark. They led me into a room with my father, and I luckily got a spot next to him.

My mama and my baby sister, Lena, went to the shower first, and it surprised me that the Nazis even had one. I had no food that night, and I didn't sleep at all as they made us sleep on the floor, and I got spooked after a bug crawled in my ear.

Mama and Lena still haven't returned, and Papa is distressed. I wonder why because they probably just lost their way back from the showers and will be coming home soon. Me and Papa were immediately put to work 5 AM, and I was very tired. They lined us up for roll call, and some of the men were so skinny, I couldn't believe my eyes. We worked all day and had no lunch, and then for dinner we had just tea with a stale piece of bread that we had to split 4 ways. I was so hungry, and I had another sleepless night thinking about where Mama and Lena could be.

It is a new day, and today, I moved during roll call, so a soldier wacked my jaw with the butt of his gun. Today, we had to carry wood back almost a mile from where we were stationed in the beginning. It was hard work, but all I could think about were the whereabouts of Mama and Lena. When we went back today for dinner, Papa was crying. I asked him why, and he said that Mama and Lena were dead. I cried out in distress and asked how it happened.

Papa replied, "I don't know."

It was hard to get to sleep tonight because of Mama and Lena, but I did, only to have my dreams rotted with nightmares.

Today is Wednesday, and Papa said that on Monday it will be our turn to shower. I am excited, as that will feel quite glorious after all the hard labor we've been through.

It is now Friday, and today, I asked Papa, "When will we ever eat more than trash?"

He replied, "I don't know, son."

Today is Saturday. I have been working hard the whole week and learned that on Sunday we get a day off from labor to tidy our living quarters, to listen to a performing orchestra, and to cut our hair. We still have to wake up at 4:30, though, which is disappointing. Today, we were out, and it was a particularly violent day. One man was shot in the back of the head for throwing a piece of wood at one of the guards and another was locked in solitary confinement for trying to escape the camp. I am told that since my papa broke his leg yesterday, he is of no use, and so they are taking him to a different camp today. It pains me he has to go because he is going to miss today, which is the day I get off and just have to do small chores.

Today, I cleaned up my boxed-in room, and I listened to a performing orchestra at dinner, but I made sure to get to bed early because they said it was going to be a trek to the showers tomorrow. I woke up early today since they made us be very proper today and they were very strict. So many people got sent to the showers, but I got told that I could stay here for longer since I was strong. I don't know what that has to do with anything but I am just going to keep doing my job.

5 years later

I woke up again today, that means I'm lucky. I'm starting to think it's dangerous to be this skinny. I haven't had a good meal in 5 years, and I've been in here for 5 years.

Recently, I have somehow been able to stand and do my job, even though I can see my ribcage in the mirror when I look at myself. I am and feel like a different person. I go every day to work just hoping I won't be in the next group that is sent to the extermination camps.

I learned about the "showers" about 7 months after I got here, after I was talking to my only friend at the time, and he told me the truth. They gas us. They put us in a chamber and gas us, and it sounds horrifying, and that is the only thing that makes me wake up at 5:30 each morning. Almost everyone was forced on a death march a few days ago, but they did leave a few thousand of us behind. I was one of the lucky ones since they needed me to do my job.

January 27, 1945

I woke up today in hopes of seeing the people had come back from the death march, but they hadn't. I knew they probably never would. I lined up for roll call but then noticed there was no one else there. I looked around, and suddenly a soldier burst out and started carrying me towards the lunch hall. I noticed right away that he was part of the Communist Army. I watched as I saw all of my companions at the camp being taken into trucks and into hospital vehicles, and I just got carried right into an ambulance.

I remember the next few days very blurrily. I was treated, and I finally ate a good meal. I was told I was lucky I lived, but I didn't even want to anymore.

I remember finally going back to Poland, but I just couldn't take it. I moved to America, and I started a new life. I got married at 27. I went into the Korean War in 1950 and served 3 years before retiring. I lived the rest of my life in peace.

(This was a fictional story based on actual accounts.)

The Eyes of the Forgotten

In a dark room, only illuminated by the light of a candle, sat the artist. He sat stooped in his little wooden chair as he agonized over his latest commission. The painting had been ordered by a Nazi soldier. It should have been easy work, as it had been for the countless others he had painted. Yet the artist hesitated, his eyes furrowed and his mind tormented by some unfathomable terror.

Suddenly, the madness seemed to clear from the artist's eyes, his brows smoothing, an idea emerging in his mind. The artist set to work, his brushes hesitant at first to mark the canvas. His hands trembled as the feathery brush touched rough grain, the paint erasing the remnants of its ashen subject. As the face of the Nazi disappeared under swathes of paint, slowly but surely, the form of a boy appeared.

Tirelessly, the artist worked, restoring the memory of the boy, thin and emaciated, to a picture of health and joviality. A pert nose and ruddy, round cheeks that dimpled at the corners of a rosebud mouth. Yet the cherubic innocence of such a face was ruined by the eyes. Fathomless pits of dark blue, they seemed ancient, filled with anguish and the haunted look of someone who had witnessed hell. It seemed almost perverse to subject a face so young to such knowledge.

Finally, he was done. And not a moment later, the Nazi stepped into the room, his very presence bringing a chill that settled deep into his bones. The artist shivered unwittingly as the Nazi stalked to the still drying portrait on the easel and saw not his own face staring back, but the face of the boy he had hung not two days ago.

The boy's name was Frederic and he had been caught stealing a piece of bread. The Nazi had him dragged to the center of the camp, where he was hung from the gallows.

Such a shame, they clucked.

Too young to go, they whispered as they clung to each other in fear.

Yet not one person stopped him, stepped in his path, as he dragged the child to his death. Not one. Not even the artist.

It might have been easier to ignore the guilt had it not been for the sight of his little body, swaying in the wind, as he slowly choked to his death. Poor little Freddie was not heavy enough for his own weight to snap his neck, so there he hung in the center of the camp for everyone to see, as the life slowly bled away from his eyes.

Those eyes had haunted the artist for days, his desperation and fear touching the very depths of the artist's soul. He shivered in excitement, thoughts racing through his head. Finally, he had defied his tormentors, denied them the right to the one thing of value he still had in this godforsaken place. *Finally, I will have peace.*

"What is this, mein Künstler?" The Nazi asked, the enamel of his teeth gleaming as he bared his teeth in a parody of a smile.

The Nazi stared at him, unwaveringly, his eyes boring into the artist. For minutes the both of them stood in silence. Once again, the Nazi turned to look at the portrait of the boy. Yet still, he said nothing. Perhaps it might have been easier to face his anger, nostrils flaring and rage contorting his features like the devil incarnate.

Finally, the Nazi made a move. Not an action of fury or sudden aggression, but one borne out of pity. Slowly, carefully, *pityingly* he laid his hand onto the shoulder of the artist. He staggered under its sudden weight and the Nazi quickly clamped down, tight as a vice. He leaned down until his lips lightly brushed the shell of the artist's ear in a lover's caress. That made it all the crueler when he simpered, his eyes filled with inconceivable pity, "You will regret this."

The next day an officer called out from a long list of names, one by one.

"Anselm Engel!"

And suddenly, the artist was gone, deported to Auschwitz, whisked away in a train that smelt of ash and despair. The painting of the boy was left behind, its eyes haunted by unspoken horrors.

Strawberries and Rubies

I had asked my mother once when we had just moved to the ghetto and life was stranger and darker than it had even been. I asked her, "Mama, are we going to be okay?"

I was nine years old, on the cusp of 10, but still, I cuddled deeper into my mother's arms that night in my parent's bed, because I could not imagine sleeping by myself in a room too cold to truly relax in. Everything was changing, people I thought I knew suddenly turned and spat on us in the streets, and I just wanted time to stop. My mother clutched me tighter against her chest, but her voice was calm when she replied.

"Of course darling. Everything is going to be okay," she told me, and her whispered, honeyed tones made it seem like fact. "I know things are looking tense right now, but this is just a little bump in the road that we have yet to pass."

Swallowing the platitudes, I cuddled deeper into the blankets, as if the thin fabric was enough to keep me safe from all the demons in the world. Perhaps Mama felt my unease because she reached a hand up and stroked my hair. I leaned into the gesture, but my face heated up when I realized what I had done, and I pulled away quickly. Mama chuckled, and I let a pout droop from my lips.

"Mama!" I whined, making sure to keep my tone soft to not wake my sleeping father, though I was sure he would only wake in the event of a bombing. "I'm a big girl now, I can't be scared."

At this, my mother laughed, and I couldn't help but feel a spark of annoyance. I detested being treated as a child. I was almost ten, certainly big enough to know that I was being a scaredy-cat for nothing. "Oh Ruthie, being scared is a part of life, and it's nothing to be ashamed of."

She seemed to realize I was doubtful, though, for she quickly followed up her statement. "Did you know your grandfather was too scared to propose to your grandmother, so she did it for him?"

This couldn't be true, I thought at first. My grandfather was a stern man, and seemed more at home fighting bears than sitting in his rickety chair, so the image of him, cowering before the prospect of proposing was unimaginable to me. I huffed disbelievingly and made to get out of Mama's arms. She pulled me back into the ring of her arms, laughing.

"No, it's true! Your grandmother had been waiting for his proposal for months, and it never came, so one day she pulled a red ribbon from her pocket, tied it around her finger, and told him that she expected a real ring soon."

Pausing, my mother reached over my head to the nightstand. She shifted something into her grasp, and I held my breath in anticipation. Turning her palm over, she revealed a beautiful ruby ring, glittering a strawberry red underneath silvery beams of moonlight. I gaped at it because my mother wore that ring every day.

She continued the story, her voice soft and warm. "Your grandfather was stunned, of course, but he bought her this ring the next day. Called it a symbol of his wife's bravery. When I got engaged, she passed it down to me, and told me that I had to be brave now that I have it."

She pulled over one of my hands, so small against hers, and tucked the ring into my hand. Carefully, I took the ring and studied it. I didn't even want to breathe, too afraid of doing any damage at all.

“One day,” my mother murmured, “you’ll grow up and find someone you want to spend the rest of your life with, and I’ll pass down that ring to you.”

I whipped my head up, taking my gaze away from the ring for a moment. I stared into my mother’s eyes, and she stared back, her gaze warm and loving. Tears welled up, clouding my vision, and I dove into my mother’s embrace. My body shook with the force of my muffled sobs, and I burrowed deeper into the safety of my mother’s arms.

“Shhhh, Schatzie,” my mother cooed, dragging a hand down my back soothingly. “It’s okay.”

Later, when my sobs smoothed into clogged little hiccups, Mama took the ring from my pinched grasp and laid it gently back on the nightstand.

“It’s okay to be scared, Ruth. You can’t ever stop feeling fear. You just have to ask yourself what’s more important to you, achieving what you want, or the fear stopping you from that.”

That was the last thing I heard before the world faded to black, and I unwillingly let sleep take me into its grasp.

Soon after that night came the day of my tenth birthday. I walked into the dining room, only for my mother to pull me down into a chair and cup her hands over my eyes, laughing all the while.

“Ruth! You can’t look yet,” she told me. “You have to wait a little longer for your surprise.”

All I could see was inky darkness, my vision reduced to not even an inch in front of me. Patience was not yet one of my virtues, so I could hardly wait, quivering and whining impatiently as I sat. Mama’s hands were bare, but, at that moment, I paid no heed to the absence of her ring.

“Can I look yet? Can I look yet?” I pestered, clutching Mama’s hands with my own. She just laughed, and I pouted, huffing. “Wait my little mouse, your father is still setting up the table.”

“Ugh. Papa! Hurry up!” I cried. A spark of annoyance flared in my chest because I. Just. Wanted. To. See. Already.

“Yes, yes, Ruth, I’m coming.”

I could hear the soft clatter of porcelain dishes being arranged on the table, and I sat up straighter in anticipation. What was it, I wondered. Cookies? Sweets? Not a full cake certainly, heavens only know where my parents could get the ingredients for that. Finally, after eons in darkness, my mother saved me from my musings by taking her hands off my face, laughing as she told me that, yes, I could finally open my eyes. Immediately prising my eyes open, I let out a little gasp of delight. On the table sat a plate of cookies, a small pie, and some nice lace doilies. In the middle of it all sat a small white bowl filled with strawberries, my favorite, though I had not seen a single one since being confined to the ghetto. They gleamed like little gems, not unlike the ruby set into Mama’s ring, and I could feel myself tearing up a little.

“Happy birthday Ruthie.” My parents smiled down at me. The sun was just setting outside, and the evening light limned everything in shades of gold and vermillion. With my parents on either side of me and the food in front, I felt like a little princess preparing to feast. A large grin spread across my face, so wide it hurt to hold, but I couldn’t stop.

“Oh, Mama, Papa,” I said, breathlessly. “I love them!”

Mama placed a hand on my shoulder, and I looked down. There was something flawed with the image it created, but I couldn’t figure it out immediately. It was strange because my

mind knew something was wrong, even if it didn't know what was off. What was it? I had stared at Mama's hand too long, and my parents started to get flustered.

"Ruth," my mother said, reaching a hand up to cup my cheek. "What's wrong, darling?"

I was silent, because I didn't know what was wrong, and the itch to find out niggled the recesses of my brain irritatingly. My mother's hand was warm like a summer's day, and I had probably been silent for too long, and then came a realization. *Oh.*

Where was Mama's ring?

Unwillingly, the words had spilled out of my mouth. My mother's hand stiffened in its place on my cheek. I looked up, and my mother faltered. She seemed to stumble over her tongue for something to say, and her expression was distraught, eyes tight and glassy like the dead eyes of a doll. The air was quiet and still, too still, and it seemed everything held its breath in preparation for *something*.

Finally, the tense mood was broken when my mother pulled a smile onto her face and forced a high, nervous chuckle, as brittle as glass.

"What do you mean darling?"

I narrowed my eyes suspiciously. There was something wrong, but Mama was keeping it quiet, for whatever reason. I now know she wanted to keep me happy--ignorance is bliss, as they say-- but at that time all I felt was annoyance mixed with hints of bitter betrayal.

"Mama," I said, not without petulance, "Where's your ring? The one grandma gave you?"

"Oh," she croaked, her voice as fragile as a leaf in the wind. She started again. "Oh. That ring? Don't worry, Ruthie. I just put it somewhere safe. I don't want to lose it before I can pass it down to you, after all."

She ended with a cracked little chuckle, and I stared at her unblinkingly. Mama sensed my skepticism, so she quickly pulled the bowl of strawberries closer, the sound of porcelain dragging against wood heavy and dull. The strawberries shimmered bright ruby red, and I felt my dogged temper dwindle the tiniest bit.

"Come on, Ruth," she bade me, leaving the bowl in front of me temptingly. "It's your birthday, don't worry about such things. Now, quickly, eat these! I know how much you love them."

I stared at her silently for a moment more but finally relented.

"Okay Mama," I joked, plucking a strawberry from the bowl and taking a bite of it. The juice dribbled down my chin and around my fingers. "As long as you haven't lost the ring. I still need you to pass it down to me you know."

There was more silence, and finally, Mama gave me another smile. It was different from the last one, less fake, but infinitely more unfathomable, infinitely more sorrowful.

"Yes, Ruthie. Of course," she said, at last. Confusingly, she added, "I can't wait to see you happily married."

"Are you going to give me that ring when I do, Mama?" I asked, licking the strawberry juice off my fingers.

"Of course, dear," she replied, ruffling my hair. "Of course."

Years later, I walked down the aisle in a billowing white gown, but my mother never gave me that ruby ring. I had no parents, no siblings, no family to see me on my happiest day. I learned that my mother had sold her precious ring for that bowl of strawberries I ate, my last birthday gift from the parents. What was I to do, I wept. How could I ever be brave now, Mama?

Mordechai Anielewicz Creative Arts Competition 2021

Art Prizes

Grades 7-8: 2D Art

First Prize (tie) **Kelsey Lavelle**, Grade 8, Newtown Middle School, Teacher: Erinn Demskis
First Prize (tie) **Sage Ondik**, Grade 8, Newtown Middle School, Teacher: Erinn Demskis
Second Prize **Mayan Kirschner**, Grade 8, Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia, Teacher: Zahava Bauer
Third Prize **Joshua Levinson**, Grade 7, Old York Road Temple-Beth Am, Rabbi Shoshana Tornberg
HM **Elana Azcuaga-Suayfeta**, Grade 8, Newtown Middle School, Teacher: Erinn Demskis
HM **Naziya Moorman**, Grade 8, La Salle Academy, Teacher: Marlene Adler

Grades 9-10: 2D Art

First Prize **Bethany Makori**, Grade 10, Padua Academy, Teacher: Jen Mrozek
Second Prize **Franchesca DiMichele**, Grade 1, Chestnut Hill Academy, Teacher: Sarah McDowell
Third Prize **Rebecca Glockner**, Grade 10, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino
HM **Mikaela Brown**, Grade 9, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino
HM **Sharon Kho**, Grade 10, Central High School, Teacher: Daniel Kannengieszer

Grades 9-10: 3D Art

HM **Brooke Carrier**, Grade 10, Central High School, Teacher: Daniel Kannengieszer
HM **Jamila Ismailova**, Grade 9, Central High School, Teacher: Daniel Kannengieszer HM

Grades 11-12: 2D Art

First Prize **Josephine Mazzola**, Grade 12, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino
Second Prize(tie) **Elisheva Pichanick**, Grade 11, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School, Teacher: Daphne Okcuoglu
Second Prize(tie) **Gabrielle Kedziora**, Grade 11, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School, Teacher: Daphne Okcuoglu
Third Prize **Clara Fisher**, Grade 12, Upper Dublin High School, Teacher: Jennifer Tulli
HM **Emma Regotti**, Grade 11, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino
HM **Brooke Traver**, Grade 11, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino

Grades 11-12: 3D Art

HM **Samantha Tuschinski**, Grade 11, Padua Academy, Teacher: MichelleRose Buscarino

Dance Prizes

Prize for 7th-8th **Shaina Berkowitz**, Grade 7, Old York Road Temple-Beth Am, Rabbi Shoshana Tornberg
HM for 7th-8th **Kacie Welch**, Grade 8, Newtown Middle School, Teacher: Erinn Demskis

Video Prize

Prize for 7th-8th **Marissa Meyer**, Grade 8, Newtown Middle School, Teacher: Erinn Demskis