

2026 Elie Wiesel Competition
Special Commendation (Tie), Junior Poetry
Kenna Werby, 8th Grade
Old Donation School, Lisa Kilczewski

Letters You'll Never Read

My family has always been secretive, secluded, and scared of me knowing the truth.

They want to protect me, to keep me safe.

But they don't know what I found.

A year ago, my mother and father left for a few hours.

It was so wrong, so unlike me. And they had told me a million times not to look in my father's office.

My curiosity grew one day as my mother told him something that stuck to me.

"I could never be the Abigail, you need me to be, no matter how hard I try."

So, I looked. Looked in the forbidden place I'd been told to leave alone.

And I found things that I wish I hadn't.

In the top drawer of my father's tall wooden desk, I found a cream colored, carefully opened envelope.

Dear Abigail,

There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about you. About my lack of communication. What I could've done differently. I was as cowardly as a sheep. I should've tried to protect you.

It's been almost a decade, but I still remember the news so vividly.

I still remember you.

My world has changed and you're a page torn from my book.

Yours truly.

His true love was in a faraway land no man could reach.

For the next few months, I took every chance to sneak into my father's office.

She was around my age. A gold six-sided star hung from her neck, and each picture showed a girl that glowed with happiness.

Another letter. But this time, not an unsent, carefully filed away one that never made it out of my father's office.

You wouldn't believe the mess my family is in.

Our synagogue was burned down, and my folks suppose there is no way to reach G-d.

I pray each day that this misery will end. But more than anything I pray that I'll see your face again.

The Catholic family we are staying with is very kind. Their basement is cold, but it is safe.

I love you,

Abigail

The letter echoed through my brain.

Next to Abigail I felt weak. I doubt I would have found the strength.

Strength to pray,

strength to hope,

strength to hide.

Strength to send a letter knowing it might be the last one.

Drops of what I guessed to be tears distorted the writing.

I can't ask my father about this. Just seeing this scrap of paper which must have been tedious and dangerous to mail

is proving the absurdity of attempting to ask.

I'm halfway through a newspaper, reading about murders and camps that make no sense to me.

Punishments for things that barely set you apart from the punishers.

I cannot remember how long I've been doing this.

It's become a habit, a lie I'm too far into.

Footsteps shuffle down the hallway.

Thud.

"What are you doing?" my father says as he rushes over to me.

"She seemed amazing. I'm so sorry."

I look up to the man who has what many would call a perfect life,

yet is eternally unhappy,

give him a knowing smile,

and put the newspaper back in the drawer.