

2024 Elie Wiesel Competition

1st Place Junior Poetry

Sanavi Chitikeshi, 8th Grade

Old Donation School, Lisa Kilczewski

Rose

The soldiers marched through our so called town, their footsteps echoing
A house built on an old wall made of tired stone and rotted bricks
We had a loose floorboard, the type that creaks and squeaks, well hidden one could say
As if that would stop them... Thud thud thud
Officers banged on our doors, and without warning, barged in

My brother trembled as he grabbed at my dress, his small fists wrapped tightly around me
I wanted to whisper in his ear, urge him to be quiet, not to worry
I was just as helpless as he was
“What’s this?” an officer with hair the color of old wood, a scar splitting down his face
I couldn’t even hear him, sweat streaming down my back, as he stared at the painting

The officer now fully faced us, his eyes gleaming with no mercy
“How much?” his foot now stomped impatiently in little taps
My heartbeat restlessly matched his pace, tap tap tap breathe breathe breathe
The frame was the color of gold, the picture priceless, a painting of me and my brother
My smile was no longer the same, a golden sunshine plummeted by thunder and rain

I could feel my mother shivering behind me, a firm hand gripping my shoulder
It wasn’t my mother who was gripping me, I realized too late
A slap streamed across my face and the tears flow free, my cheek burning with his handprint
The blow was hard and I felt my body shaking, how I hated my fear my sorrow
I wished for the wings of a butterfly, the color of roses

A wail from my brother, a gasp from my parents as another officer pushed the carpet away
The dust filled the air my mind and on me, my dress now covered with filth and soot
Don’t do it Don’t do it Don’t do it
My pleas were hidden like a jewel in the darkness, though we had no value of jewels

A few flimsy coins, a small container of utensils, a necklace for my mother, storybooks of sorts
He took them all, grabbed them in his meaty hands
A gruffly voice in my ear, “Thought you could hide this, didn’t you?”
My head shook as I couldn’t mouth the words

Another hand snatched my wrist, with such force, I was sure it would leave a gruesome mark
He took hold of my ring, in his undeserving palms, a streak of gold lighting the floor

The ring was priceless to me, for I did not care about the gold but the significance
My grandmother gave it to me, slipped it on my bony finger, asked me to take care of it

It was a ring with a flower caressed on it, a rosebud, an interment of my name: Rose
Without it, I felt my life shatter into pieces like broken glass
A mirror that couldn't be fixed, couldn't be put together
"We'll be alright," my father had said
My brother and mother sitting at the ruined table

No, nothing would be alright, never
The news came, that we would be evacuated soon
I now stared at my bare finger, a red circle around it
Like a reflection back at you, made of broken glass, distorted
Nothing would be the same, I am no Rose