

2025 Elie Wiesel Competition

3rd Place Senior Poetry

Vivian Deans, 11th Grade

Norfolk Academy, Charlotte Zito

Two Sides of the Same Stone

It is 1918.

A girl of 11 sits consumed at her father's desk, flipping through the week's pages.

Concerned, consumed, disgusted, she wallows in the anguish of her countrymen.

Inside her, a void grows. Shame, indignity, at watching her great country, her people felled by those rowdy fools across the sea.

Bumbling Icarus flew into the heavens, but instead, it was the sun who conceded. Ire would grow in the belly of Germany.

They would become one people, one empire, with one leader.

Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer.

It is 1941.

Now a woman, she reads the paper: glorious sacrifices of the men on the front lines.

She revels in her day-- dreams of Germany's illustrious future.

She pictures beautiful faces painting the city: eyes as bright and stark as lightning bolts.

One day she will tell her children of the good days, when Germany was strong, feared, respected.

Together they will rejoice as they stand atop the bones of the dead, wearing the shoes wrestled from their feet, and the gold ripped from their jaws.

Precious lies coating their consciousness, drenching the life that lays ahead.

It is 1943.

A young and pious boy weeps over passages in the Talmud,

He feels the world deeply-- the sorrows and joys of his people transcribed in the sacred pages.

He gazes down at the yellow star plastered to his chest.

His father tells him it is but a nuisance. Problematic. But lethal? Of course not.

Years later he would come to know the truth. "Poor father!", he would say, "Of what then did you die?" (Wiesel 11).

Day after day, men in green uniforms arrive on their doorsteps.

He lays in a bed which is not his own and turns an ear to the broken window at his side.

There are whispers among the other dwellers:

another relocation-- treacherous transports to barren lands unknown.

Nervous, his tongue prods at the golden crown which adorns his back tooth.

He looks to his father, a pillar of strength.

He is told to fear not: they wouldn't, he hears, they couldn't; we must have faith.

He gazes past the sea of children in the ghetto's streets, the living dead.

Past the barbed gates of the ghetto he hears vociferous chants from those outside:

"Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer"!

It is 1944.

The boy is now a man, by no choice of his own.

Starving, dying, he wrestles with the choice between his father's survival and his own.

Lying numb in the Auschwitz hospital bunk, his father clinging to life just below,

he thinks to himself about where "faith" has gotten them,

and sighs as he feels a void growing inside him as a response, dark and empty as the night itself.

He does not weep, cannot; he yearns to feel grief, pity for his suffering father,
but as he searches for a feeling, tongue prodding at the hole where his golden crown used to be,
he finds only a relief at the thought that he won't have to share his bread anymore.
Shame rushes through him like a Great Flood.

It is the next day.

He gazes upon the now empty bed-- the cage which used to cradle his fathers fragile frame,
He sheds no tear and utters no prayer, for the lord has forsaken his people.

He gazes not at his greasy page from the Torah, the sacred contraband clenched in his palm,
But gapes vacantly at the words besmearing the wall outside:

"Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer".