

Four Views of a Subhuman

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My shining boots click against the street as I stroll through the neighborhood. The crispness of my uniform and the shine from my pin, proudly declaring I am a Nazi, seem out of place in the grungy area. That is all for the best. I want to be as distant from these Jews as possible. I make sure to hold myself stiff, showing that I certainly am better than these pigs. I hear a child wailing and whip towards the noise. I recognize the mother, the Jewish tailor's wife, but I would never bother myself with learning her name, or the name of any Jew for that matter.

"Shut your child up," I spit. Typical Jewish parents can't even keep their children in line. The woman stays silent and her son keeps wailing.

"*Untermensch!*" Subhuman. I see the woman's face fall at my word and my heart rises. I have taught her a lesson she won't forget.

I push my little sister behind me. She shouldn't see this. I'm much older, but I only dare to peek out from behind the lacey curtain over our window. The noise outside is too loud to ignore. Soldiers outside are yelling and waving their big guns in the faces of the people that are walking outside down the street. My momma told me that's where the Jewish people live. I see one woman clinging to her daughter's hand. A few young boys and her husband follow close behind. I recognize them as the Braunstein family; they have a tailoring business. Mrs. Braunstein is my favorite. She always gives me candy with a wide smile when I go into the shop. Other families are leaving their houses too, but I can only look at Mrs. Braunstein. Even from far away, I can tell that she is crying. Maybe I should go see if she wants some candy. I grab a piece from the counter and head towards the door. I barely crack it open before my mother grabs me, throwing me backwards.

"Honey, don't go outside. Don't ever go outside when you see those men," she says pointing to the ones with the guns. I begin to bawl; I hate when mommy yells. She calms me down then

sends me off to play. At night, I sneak up to the window and peer outside. The Braunstein's house is empty. No lights are on. The door is open, welcoming no one. It looks so empty without everyone packed inside. A tear drops onto my cheek. I close the curtain.

My bag is gone, my head is shaven, and I am left with a burning arm, my new name imprinted on it. All I can really think about though is my husband. Where is he? Is he alive? I spend the night in my shared bed, crying in mourning over what I know is a miserable fate. My body is thin, and the lack of sleep with the forced work takes its toll. I can no longer manage to get out of bed. The woman in the bed next to me shakes me, trying to remove me from my misery.

"Please," she says, "be strong. Maybe your husband is still alive." I fully doubt her words but she lights a match to start the small flame of hope in my empty heart. I crawl out of bed, trying to find the words to thank her, but she is already gone. That night I find her.

"How can you have so much hope? Even if my husband is alive we will certainly die here," I dare to ask.

She hesitates but her words sound confident. "The girl who sleeps next to me, she is my daughter. I will stay alive so she can survive. Then we will see my husband and my sons and start again."

I expect liberating the camps to be the only optimistic time after all the months I spent in war. I was wrong. When I entered the camp I could see, smell, *feel* the horror that had settled into the corpse like figures. One woman was sitting, her bony shoulders folding over.

Perhaps she hadn't heard that food was being served in the center of camp. I approach her. My heart was pounding into the ground.

"Ma'am, there is food over there."

The only response I get is a sob that was so heartbreaking it could fly away to Heaven. I try to speak again but words seem to catch in my throat. I have done my job. I told her. I should go. I turn to leave, putting this woman behind me. I glance over my shoulder just to be sure I should go. She looks up and catches my eye. I have never seen such pain. Leaving now would only make those eyes stay with me forever. I will never be able to forget her. I slowly turn around.

"Ma'am, do you need a blanket? Maybe some water? I can find you a coat. Please! Food will help."

Her arm dropped from her head to the ground revealing a girl cradled in her arms. A girl with the same eyes I could never forget. I became overwhelmed; vomit burned the back of my throat.

Her head rolled slowly towards me. "My husband is dead, my children are dead," she whispered, "Let me stay empty here. I can never live again."

"Ma'am please! Just tell me your name!"

"Untermensch"

Works Cited

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