

“A Full Night’s Rest”
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A Full Night's Rest

Gunshots could be heard from miles away while our fellow prisoners were being beaten to death. I can feel a freezing cold sweat trickle down my forehead, trying to catch its saltiness with my beyond chapped lips hoping to rehydrate myself.

The snow on our feet was nearly as cold as the guards were to us. At times my feet were even numb. I was never a fan of the cold before all of this. My friends would all try to get me to come outside to play, but I would never budge. I wish for that more than anything now. None of them could ask me now, for they've all died. The only one still with me was my brother, Kristoff. He was the only thing keeping me together, giving me hope. My stomach had one of the most excruciating pains I've ever felt. I was starving. The guards would only give us a small slice of bread or a small portion of soup twice a day. I've seen a man fight his own father for his bread, and win. The camp I've been staying in, Birkenau, has been home to many violent altercations. My best friend since childhood, Arthur, was beaten to death by a fellow inmate. If I remember correctly, all he did was attempt to take someone else's soup.

When I woke up early in the morning, I was rushed to work. No breakfast or shower. One thousand prisoners and I were to march what felt like one hundred miles to the factory where we produced bullets. I hated that job. After a 14 hour work day, I would have to march back to the camp near barefoot in the snow. I'd have to wake up early tomorrow morning, and do this all over again.

By the time I arrived back at the camp, I was greeted by a riot. As I investigated it further, I found that Kristoff was fighting some random inmate for taking his bread. It was happening all over again. Many moons ago, Kristoff tried to fight someone over a portion of his bread. The fight landed him in the infirmary for a couple weeks, but he never told me why.

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I think it has been just over two years since we were taken away from our mother. I can still remember it to this day. It all happened so fast. The day was April 14, 1940. It was a somber Sunday afternoon, it had rained the night before so it was a rather muddy trip. We were evicted from our house and forced onto crowded train cars. The air quality was horrible, you could barely breathe. Birkenau wasn't much better than the cattle cars. It was crowded, messy, and filled with sorrow. I didn't see a single smile when I was there. Everybody I came across wanted their suffering to end.

The Kommandant called about 1100 of us to go take showers. We all followed, overflowing with glee, it was too good to be true. This is the best thing to happen to some of us in years. After we all undressed, we climbed our way into a large brick room. The SS officer who led us to it told us to sit still and wait for a second. We thought that this could turn everything around; some of us haven't had a hot shower in years.

Before I know it, there is a green steam seeping into the large room. I started choking, and beginning to suffocate. They had poisoned us. My peers were dropping like flies. It was terrifying. The world was starting to go black. This is not how I wanted to die; poison gas in a room filled with strangers.

The room went black.

I snapped forward in my bed, hyperventilating. I was scared out of my mind. For a second, I thought I was back in Birkenau. I needed to look around the room to clarify that I wasn't. My wife woke up next to me confused, but after a few seconds she realized what was happening and started to comfort me. It happened again. I had a nightmare. How could I forget how terrible the years of the Holocaust were - how could anyone forget?

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