

Third Place  
Fiction Writing, Division I  
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*Armed with Rust*  
Word Count: 990

## Armed with Rust

I remember that day.

The day now lost to time.

I would roam the streets,

My parents not far behind.

Not to stray far, my mother scolded.

I did.

I hopped from place to place.

I skipped, I laughed.

*Ouch!*

I tripped and fell to the ground.

The cold, hard, pavement.

My knee, bruised and beaten.

I cradled it, rowing forward and back.

Tears threatened to sting my eyes.

My leg felt numb.

I closed my eyes, trying not to focus on the tiny specs of blood.

*Spwat!*

Something else, something new.

On my knee, a hot, liquidy, substance.

I opened my eyes.

It's spit.

Someone had spat on me. On my leg.

“Dummes jüdisches Mädchen!” (*Stupid Jewish girl!*)

What does being a Jew have to do with anything?

I couldn't bring myself to look up, my knee still close to my chest.

The man left, I felt his leather boots rhythmically stomping away.

He was laughing.

They rushed to me. I felt them rush to me, footsteps vibrating on the ground.

My parents.

My parents' worried, high-pitched voices attempted talking over the pain.

I wasn't listening.

I could still feel the phlegm on my knee, only it was now enveloping my being; my soul.

I could feel it in between the crevices of my hard, metallic structure.

His voice echoed loudly, repeatedly, through my mind – every word accompanied with spittle.

His face was nothing but a mystery, still every syllable rained with saliva.

And its moisture would slowly break me.

I would soon rust.

Protests, signs.

They went after my father's business.

“Kauf nicht bei Juden!” (Don't buy from Jews!)

It didn't work, at first.

Mere words – harshly voiced or scribbled onto a surface area –

Didn't fully convince Germans not to purchase a pastry from my father's bakery, especially one as impactful as his.

That is, until *they* started employing small acts of savagery.

Cruelty, hatred – outside his door.

Screams turned into shouts, shouts turned into shoves.

No deaths; not yet, not now.

I could still remember his tear-filled eyes, his sobs for it to stop.

He never let it be heard, no,

Not to them.

Only to us, the true him was visible.

My heart dropped when mother had to usher me away from his cold, dead, gaze.

What I saw was no longer my father,

But a weapon.

“Dein Vater ist heutzutage nicht mehr selbst.” (*Your father isn’t himself these days.*)

Was he not, mother? Was this not what *they* saw in us? Was this not what *they* wanted to avoid?

“Es ist nichts Falsches daran, Jude zu sein, meine Liebe.” (*There’s nothing wrong with being Jewish, my love.*)

I had a hard time believing that,

And clearly, I wasn’t the only one.

People started avoiding my father’s bakery altogether.

Ignorance was no longer an option, he’d said.

That’s when I felt it. The rust. That same rust my father’s spirit must’ve died at the hands of.

The start of my decaying.

Our family was going to have to find another means of income,

Or we were going to starve.

I didn't understand what was happening.

How had it escalated so badly?

Taking away my father, taking away my friends, my education, my sense of self – was it not enough?

We'd soon be sent somewhere.

We had no say in the matter, anyone who defied *his* authority was to be killed.

That was how I had lost mother.

Death was all around.

Infants, innocent souls who hadn't been on this earth long enough to have a grasp on reality as we knew it, were being slaughtered.

There was hardly enough food on the trains, so even if they didn't, they would die from starvation, dehydration, and lack of oxygen instead.

It was as if the rust from our skin was piercing theirs.

I felt sick.

We'd been here three weeks.

Working, farming.

Rotting, dying.

Starving, starving, *starving*.

Used.

We were being used.

That was all we were good for.

Until we rusted. Until we broke.

From that point on, they would get rid of us.

We were sent somewhere.

Something was different.

One big massive hole, they told us to dig.

I knew. I knew, I knew, I knew.

Yet I complied.

One big scrap of rusted metal.

Sharp, a piece of what it used to be.

Thin, fragile metal was being bent.

I was being bent.

Dig, dig, dig.

I kept digging, waiting for the snap.

Dig, dig, dig.

We are weapons.

They view us as weapons.

Hiding in the shadows, waiting to strike.

They only value their own, ones who's trigger only they can pull.

Ones they can predict.

We are dangerous. We are unpredictable.

We are a threat.

We must be made broken.

Get in, they gestured.

I obliged.

What else could I have done?

I lay there, helpless.

If we really were just weapons,

Then why couldn't we fight back?

Why must we remain so powerless under their touch?

Why must we slowly rot?

Mother's words were true. We were never truly weapons.

It was *him* who made us believe we were as such.



Years of sharpening had led us to believe we were as such. Years of sharpening not only managed to shape us into the role of the weapon, but it had also managed to shape their perception of us too. Those years of hatred, what I had considered ‘cruelty,’ was merely just the start of it, was merely them honing us out.

His laws shaped us into what they saw us as for the longest time.

And when we were sharpened enough, they used us. Abused us.

Sometimes, just for the fun of it.

Then, slowly, we would rust.

*Bang!*

That’s when it was time.

That’s when it was time for us to be tossed away, never to be used again.

*Bang!*

Nothing but a rusty scrap of metal, waiting to be discarded.

*Bang!*

Completely powerless to stop it.

*Snap!*

## Works Cited

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