

Third Place Division I – Writing

Aarushi Roy, Grade 7

Wings of Hope

Copley-Fairlawn Middle School

Jennifer Adair, Instructor

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Wings of Hope

Mama and I used to visit the local park when I was little.
We used to laugh together, and point at the birds singing to each other above us.
“Du hast Flügel,” I remember her saying to me. You have wings.
She said that where birds sang was hope, and they were the symbol of Hashem.
I didn’t understand what she meant at the time, or what being Jewish even was.
All I thought about was laughing with my mother, and feeling like I could fly.

The first hit comes. I can feel my temple throbbing as blood trickles down my nose.
She reels in for another as everyone is watching.
Everyone is watching.
Why weren’t they saying anything? Surely somebody knows this shouldn’t be happening.
It feels like everything is falling. Where are my wings?
It’s all white for a second. It hurts so much.
I’m on the floor now. Her friends hold my arms down and she digs her foot into my neck.
Why are they still silent? Why, why why why?
“Ich hoffe, sie vergasen dich wie die anderen!” She hisses and my vision goes blurry.
I hope they gas you like the rest of them.
My face is pale now.
The teacher walks in, glancing over at us. He doesn’t say anything but clears his throat instead.
I can still taste the blood in my mouth.

Mama hugs me tight as we sit at the counter together.
She’s one of the professors who have been expelled because of Hitler’s new law.
It stops Jews from becoming professors, teachers, vets, and much more.
She along with thousands of others have nowhere to go.
I hug Mom back as I look up at her, tears streaming down her cheeks.
This isn’t her fault.
This shouldn’t be happening.
It’s getting harder for me to feel my wings.
I remind myself that they are still there. I will never let them leave me.
What have we done wrong?

Two lines stand in front of me.
My eyes are puffy and I’m shaking from the adrenaline.
I take a deep breath and walk forward.
The German looks me up and down as I stand before him.
“Sechzehn?” He said coldly. Sixteen?
They had put all the young children on the left line.

All of us know where the left line leads.
I find myself slowly nodding, breathing hard.
This doesn't feel real.
I am so close to crying. So close.
Can he tell I am lying?
A moment of silence passes.
He points to the other line, the right.
So close. It had been so close.
My wings are faint.
I hope they last until I am able to fly again.

"No birds sing at Auschwitz."
I've been hearing that often around the barracks.
I haven't seen my wings since I arrived.
Six months if I am counting correctly.
But I stand true to my word, I will never let my wings leave me.
I don't think I'll be seeing Mama again.
Others get taken every day.
We don't ever see them again.
I am so cold. You can see the outline of my ribs through my skin.
Food is scarce. A murky smell hangs over the camp like a reminder of death.
It feels like I'm falling constantly. Maybe if I try hard enough I can pretend that it's flying.
Nothing will be the same.
As I look through the tiny window in our barrack I see a single bird land on the grass.
It whistles a happy tune and I feel tears start to fall.
If hope is still there, please let it save us.

It's been 2 months since I was rescued.
I still don't know where Mama is.
It still feels like I am falling.
I don't have the energy to fly right now.
My wings are barely attached though the use for them is over.
Everything I know and love is gone, including my Mama.
I slowly walk into my new classroom.
A few people look over at me. One girl shoots me a shy smile.
The teacher introduces me and says I am Jewish. Is that how introductions are now?
His face is blank. So are some of the others.
A boy looks at me, his face scrunched up in anger.
The war may have ended, but society hadn't changed at all.
They'll never look at us like real people.
I feel tears forming as I try to keep myself from crying.
Was I even worth leaving the concentration camp?
Suddenly I feel a hand on my shoulder. It's the girl who smiled at me.
Can I sit here? she asks, and when I nod she puts her books down and pulls out her pencil.

The boy walks up to our table and I see his mouth open like he's going to say something. He closes it again when the girl shoots him a glare. He walks back shoulders slumped. She says her name is Zipporah. That's nice. Like the bird. We work and talk, laughing together about our favorite books and subjects. We gossip about the mean boy across the room. It's so peaceful and suddenly I feel like it'll be okay, and eventually, things will be normal again. I feel warm everywhere and I realize it doesn't feel like I'm falling anymore. It has been so long since I've had someone to talk to. Suddenly I feel something I haven't felt in a long time. It feels like I'm flying.

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