

Honorable Mention

Division I – Writing

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The Hammer

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Word Count 999

The Hammer

March 23, 1933

“Did you guys hear what happened?” I shouted over the wind.

We ran in all directions, playing tag. My four friends, Akeeva, Medad, Hertha, Hermann, and I became friends a few months ago when I moved to this town. Today, the atmosphere felt different. We weren’t shouting, laughing, or tackling each other, nor did we run through the puddles or swing from the high branches. There was an uneasy feeling in the air after the events of the evening before.

“What happened, Otto?” Hertha questioned.

“Really, Hertha? Everyone in town knows,” Hermann snapped. “They took a load of Jews in town to some camp.”

Ouch. The feeling is like a hammer, bruising my insides. Akeeva shuddered and started tearing up immediately, Medad clenched his fists.

Medad treats Akeeva like a little sister; They are always together. Hermann and Hertha are twins, each with the most beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes. Hermann is strong-minded and a little snarky, while Hertha is a bit of an airhead. She wouldn’t even know how old she was so long as her brother didn’t tell her. Her curls bounced as she ran to the side of the street.

“Don’t be rude, Hermann,” She shot back.

Akeeva and Medad stayed quiet. They were both Jewish, I could tell they were on guard. Akeeva started crying. She always cries. Normally Medad would just pat her back and coddle her until she stopped. Today, he just stood there in silence. This worries me. Medad is never scared or upset, so what’s happening now?

A small crack is chipping away at me. I never say anything. Nothing when Hermann insults someone, nothing when Hertha is confused, nothing when Akeeva is crying, and nothing when I should be defending my friends.

Hitler was appointed as chancellor earlier this year and was now taking groups of Jewish people in our town to extermination camps. I just don’t understand. I’m friends with Akeeva and Medad, and I don’t want them to be sent away or killed.

“I’ll inform you later, Hertha. At least we’ll have more space to play in this crowded town.”

This rude talk wasn’t unusual for Hermann, but it put a horrible taste in the air. He was always careless and started acting weird around us a few weeks ago.

Medad’s face was unreadable. While I wish he had said something, he just grabbed Akeeva by the arm and silently walked down the street. We didn’t see them for a few days after.

April 8, 1933

There were many boycotts last week; people in town refused to visit stores owned by “Jews”, and ransacked homes. Medad’s dad was attacked at his bakery and Akeeva’s grandma was captured.

It gathers in my stomach. Whack, Whack, Whack. The hammer is slowly forming a hole in my being; my soul. It is becoming audible, whispering that this is wrong and I should do

something, but what?

My friends have done nothing wrong. Why does this happen? Why does no one do anything? Where will Hitler draw the line? How long will this last? There are so many unanswered questions.

Medad and Akeeva haven't played with us since the boycotts started. I hope they're okay.

April 28, 1933

We finally saw Akeeva for the last time. She and Medad both came to play. Their families are sharing a hiding spot. Medad looked deflated, and Akeeva looked strained. Her tight smile and watery brown eyes pained me.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The tool struck me inside.

"I'm sure all is well," Hertha offered. "There's no chance they're killing people. This's fake news!"

Hermann huffed under his breath, "Oh, it's certainly real."

He glowered at them; as if they were dangerous bugs he was about to squash. His eyes were cold, apathetic, and fearful; his muscles were tight. He was scared of them. He wanted our friends to disappear. That was the day I realized they were the problem. People like Hermann who don't care, people like Hertha who don't believe, and people like the Nazis and Hitler who cause all this prejudice. I can't be mad at them though; this is what kids like Hermann and Hertha are taught. I can only hope they'll also receive the gut feeling inside that will convince them to change their minds.

May 17, 1933

A month ago, the Gestapo was established: the secret police force of Nazi Germany. Akeeva was uprooted the same week. The Gestapo were taking groups of Jewish children, and she was captured. I lost one of my closest friends because of this mess. I don't know if I'll ever see her again.

The hammer finally breaks through. I have to do something.

I told my father and mother when I arrived at home. They were initially nervous, but as I progressed, my words seemed to light a fire in their eyes. My parents sprung to action, grabbing their coats and taking me through town to Medad's house.

When we arrived, the house was a mess. Torn from the inside out, the family had obviously survived a devastating rampage. Medad and I played while our parents had a deep conversation. He was glad to see me, and I was glad he was safe.

Before we knew it, he was hugging his parents goodbye. A forever goodbye. He never saw them again after we took him home.

August 10, 1934

It's been a year since we took Medad in. Hitler proclaimed himself Führer und Reichskanzler, or, Leader and Reich Chancellor. The armed forces are now forced to swear their allegiance to him. We must hold hope. Even though he is gaining more power, my family and others worldwide will stand against him. I can't just wish for other people to have a tool like mine. I must supply them with one using my words and dedication. I will

hold the hammer that broke through me proudly in my heart and will take it to break through other people's doubts and excuses.

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