

Echoes in the Storm: A Night at Bergen Belsen

After a very harrowing ride of over 14 hours, squeezed in an old iron carriage that was breaking down while it had dozens of souls inside it, I finally reached Bergen Belsen. There was only one small window to allow air to creep through; it did little to ease the sense of claustrophobia or my growing fear. With each inhalation of air, it was as if a millstone of lead weighed upon my chest; faces of family, lost somewhere on the way, flashed into my mind—a grim acceptance slowly creeping in, like a cold draught, that I might never see them again. I was done. It feels as though these hours have only just passed now, seared into my memory.

Coming out of the train, even the air seemed to weigh down upon me, heavy and thick with something chillingly dark. In the distance, chimneys towered against the sky, gray skeletal giants, an unmistakable parody of the Eiffel Tower—far from anything which would evoke hope. Before me, a line of children and mothers, draped in the haunting black-and-white stripes of their captivity, stood outside the gas chambers. Their tears seemed to blend into one shared ocean of despair, a tragic expression of grief with no place to escape. The only hope was a miracle, some godly hand which would save them from the clutches of hovering death. I can remember that cold which pierced into my bones that day, the sound of my teeth chattering, ominous clouds rolling across the sky, crashing into pieces like dark waves.

The sky was an ominous backdrop of rumbling thunder, and promptly, heavy droplets of rain started falling, sharp as crystals—each drop hitting with brute force and sending the ground into a sea of brown mud. The raindrops smacked the earth with such force that small craters were formed in the mud, giving it an appearance much like the pockmarked face of the moon. The trees, which were completely lifeless, shrouded in stillness, were now suddenly alive, their branches dancing with exuberance as if awakened by the tornado of rain. Soon, sheets of rain poured down; the water gathered and whirled in rivulets, mingling with the crimson life stains already drenched into the earth. The formerly dull metal roofs shone brightly in the murky light, reflecting the moody palette of the sky.

Howling wind and piercing thunder erupted into a din so that it was as if warplanes hovered above, releasing lightning strikes to crack like gunfire. The tempest and the horrors of the camp became one—the raging, merciless element. I saw in the rain, as in a dream—so unreal, unlike anything that could be; on one side, a few individuals in shimmering yellow raincoats and boots, huddled together, with fuming mugs of hot tea in front of them to counter the bitter cold.

Others, without any cover at all, sat crouched in the mud with weakened bodies and burning lips. It is a moment of desperation wherein they had to crouch down so low to the point that they even needed to lick the droplets of rain with a hope to soothe their thirst—the most inferior of human needs. The sound of the rain, drumming against the green leaves above, was curiously terminal, a haunting melody that boomed in the chaos. The storm finally began to subside, the violent rain transforming into mist that clung to everything in view, rendering them a blinding white, like fresh snow on everything. There was an absolute silence, except for the soft rustling of leaves. As minutes dragged into hours, the sky darkened down to a deep navy and the stars came out, giving the camp an eerie glow.

The soft light of the moon shone down, its silvery glow surreal on the scene below. It all felt like a dream-
if only it could be a nightmare.

The rhythmic chirping of katydids droned serenadingly in the background, a haunting lullaby to the violence still unfolding. The gunfire pierced through the night air, mixing with guttural screams and broken sobs of trapped souls around me. And there, in the cold star-lit night-sky, was entwined nature with suffering-the world great, unbearably small.