Like Father Like Son

The yelling of angry German men, both evil and not, blended with the songs of those being beaten. Although the past year had been unquestionably horrible, that night was the worst. Nazi’s were patrolling the streets, causing havoc everywhere. They were going throughout the stores of Jewish men, ripping them from their lives and hauling them away, most likely to Concentration Camps. That night brought darkness, but the streets were ablaze in the fire of stores the Nazi’s lit. I should not be able to recall these details since my family and I were supposed to be hiding in the depths of our home. But I was not afraid. At least, not at the moment.

But that changed very quickly.

A pounding came to our door. That’s odd, I thought. I would not take the Nazi’s as polite people. It was almost taunting me. I believed we could have been saved by some unknown hero behind the door, but in a moment the sound of cracking wood filled the empty house, breaking our door in thirds. In the stout frame of the door stood a man’s silhouette. I scrambled to the back, dark corner of the room. I had yet to be spotted, but they weren’t looking for me. They were searching for my father.

By the sound of my father's grunts and my mother's screams, I realized they found him. I debated running out to help him and then realized that I would be a better help by not getting caught. So I stayed hidden in the depths of the room. Soon, I saw my father's writhing figure being dragged out of our small home. He knocked pictures off the wall, flowers spilled out of their vases, a path of pain followed him out the door.

As soon as the last Nazi left the house, I stood up, no longer afraid. If they didn’t take my
mother, they wouldn’t take me, a 17-year-old boy. Or maybe they would, but I was willing to risk it. I sneaked over to the door frame, now ragged with splintering wood, and peeked. A group of Jewish men were getting kicked and beaten in the middle of the square. As one man fell unconscious, two more were beaten, soon joining him.

I was frozen in the doorway. My fear crawled and filled every inch of my body. But then I saw my father. He had a bloodied lip and black eye within the 3 minutes he had been hauled off. He was alone for the moment, but a Nazi was making his way down the line, snatching the men and taking them away. It was only moments before my father was taken away, maybe to never be seen again. I knew we needed him; money was tight, and he was our provider. Without him, we’d have nothing.

That’s it. That is the thought that drove me to move my legs. As I took a step outside, my mother took a step out of the basement. She was screaming, but it nearly blended with the screams of the men in our square. I continued walking, blocking any thoughts. The more I thought about it, the more likely I would turn around.

I made it to my father in the square, surprisingly unnoticed. He was weak and tired, already washed out from the beatings. He would not survive in any death camps. I slowly dragged him up and slung his arm around my shoulder. The weight was difficult to carry, but I managed.

I hobbled down the broken slab sidewalks, back to our little home. My mother and sisters were waiting, dragging my father inside, reaching for me. I did it! I thought. I can go save the others! But suddenly, a rough hand grabbed the back of my collar and yanked, causing me to fall on my back, sprawled and dazed on the gritty ground. A man with an ash-streaked face glared
down at me and smiled. Soon, I was being dragged to the square.

I managed to find my house between the fires and chaos. Nobody had noticed my father's disappearance. He was peeking through the curtains, looking at me. I shook my head. If he came after me, what I managed would have been pointless.

The moment lasted a second, and then my head snapped to the side, a result from a tall, lanky man hitting his hand against my cheek. A fire erupted on the left side of my face, matching the burning by my nose from the punches. They did not trust me anymore, saw me as a threat, and dragged me off to a truck made of metal, full of grown, battered, men.

In less than five minutes, the truck filled, and the doors slam shut, crushing one man’s fingers.

No. No, no, no. This wasn’t supposed to happen.

I began to shift through the men, gagging at the odor being emitted. Through the dark, I managed to find the wall and shimmy along until I found the back door. I grabbed an empty crate, assessing what would be needed to pop the door open. I slammed the crate against the middle of the two doors myriad times until it jarred open.

I sighed a sigh of success. I was free. I would see my family. At that time, I doubted the Nazi’s skills. I had freed my father without a problem, and would now free myself. It was too easy. And I was only a child. I was so brave as to laugh as I shimmied out the door.

Once out, I didn’t wait for even a second before I hopped off, spraying gravel as I tumbled onto the road. I brushed myself off and begin to run down the road, a small limp with my right leg from the odd landing. Walking back home felt impossibly right, even though I couldn’t have been gone for more than a half hour.
Then everything changed. The sound of the engine stopped, leaving the rural area in empty silence. I turned to see three men in uniforms marked with a swastika pointing at me. Charged with adrenaline, I began to run faster. How did they notice I had escaped? I was unsure but ran still. I wanted to get home, I needed to get home.

I heard a loud pop as they began to shoot their guns. Of course. I should have prepared for this. Now I’d enter a death camp injured, and not be able to work, and then get beaten. This was not how this was supposed to happen. But the Nazi’s, I learned, had other plans. I learned these plans as a bullet pierced my brain, just above the left ear. I learned these plans as my vision blacked, and I tumbled into the asphalt. I learned these plans as I lay on the ground, my blood making a soup of the dirt on the road. I learned these plans as my life seeped out of me. The plans to kill.

This could have been my father I thought. At least he’s home, safe and well. My brothers can help out, fill my shoes. My home will be fine. I will be fine.

And my final thoughts comforted me as I fell into an eternal light.