Night by Elie Wiesel

Chapter 2

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<tr>
<th>Themes to watch for:</th>
<th>1) Cost of S______________________________</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2) D ____________________, which is defined as the stripping away or</td>
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<td>identity; the act of degrading people in order to strip them of human qualities</td>
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<td>or attributes.</td>
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<td>3) D____________________, which means to cause a person to become less</td>
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<td>sensitive or less emotionally responsive due to prolonged exposure to</td>
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<td>violence or trauma.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Motifs to watch for:</th>
<th>1) F_____________ &amp; S_____________ relationships</th>
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<td>2) F_____________ &amp; P_____________</td>
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Night- Chapter 2

Lying down was out of the question, and we were only able to sit by deciding to take turns. There was very little air. The lucky ones who happened to be near a window could see the blossoming countryside roll by.

After two days of traveling, we began to be tortured by thirst. Then the heat became unbearable.

Free from all social constraint, the young people gave way openly to instinct, taking advantage of the darkness to copulate in our midst, without caring about anyone else, as though they were alone in the world. The rest pretended not to notice anything.

We still had a few provisions left. But we never ate enough to satisfy our hunger. To save was our rule; to save up for tomorrow. Tomorrow might be worse.

The train stopped at Kaschau, a little town on the Czechoslovak frontier. We realized then that we were not going to stay in Hungary. Our eyes were opened, but too late.

The door of the car slid open. A German officer, accompanied by a Hungarian lieutenant-interpreter, came up and introduced himself.

"From this moment, you come under the authority of the German army. Those of you who still have gold, silver, or watches in your possession must give them up now. Anyone who is later found to have kept anything will be shot on the spot. Secondly, anyone who feels ill may go to the hospital car. That's all."

The Hungarian lieutenant went among us with a basket and collected the last possessions from those who no longer wished to taste the bitterness of terror.

"There are eighty of you in the wagon," added the German officer." If anyone is missing, you'll all be shot, like dogs...."
They disappeared. The doors were closed. We were caught in a trap, right up to our necks. The doors were nailed up; the way back was finally cut off. The world was a cattle wagon hermetically sealed.

We had a woman with us named Madame Schacht. She was about fifty; her ten-year-old son was with her, crouched in a corner. Her husband and two eldest sons had been deported with the first transport by mistake. The separation had completely broken her.

I knew her well. A quiet woman with tense, burning eyes, she had often been to our house. Her husband, who was a pious man, spent his days and nights in study, and it was she who worked to support the family.

Madame Schacht had gone out of her mind. On the first day of the journey she had already begun to moan and to keep asking why she had been separated from her family. As time went on, her cries grew hysterical.

On the third night, while we slept, some of us sitting one against the other and some standing, a piercing cry split the silence:

"Fire! I can see a fire! I can see a fire!"

There was a moment's panic. Who was it who had cried out? It was Madame Schacht. Standing in the middle of the wagon, in the pale light from the windows, she looked like a withered tree in a cornfield. She pointed her arm toward the window, screaming:

"Look! Look at it! Fire! A terrible fire! Mercy! Oh, that fire!"

Some of the men pressed up against the bars. There was nothing there; only the darkness.

The shock of this terrible awakening stayed with us for a long time. We still trembled from it. With every groan of the wheels on the rail, we felt that an abyss was about to open beneath our bodies. Powerless to still our own anguish, we tried to console ourselves: "She's mad, poor soul...."

Someone had put a damp cloth on her brow, to calm her, but still her screams went on: "Fire! Fire!"

Her little boy was crying, hanging onto her skirt, trying to take hold of her hands. "It's all right, Mummy! There's nothing there.... Sit down...." This shook me even more than his mother's screams had done.

Some women tried to calm her. "You'll find your husband and your sons again ... in a few days...."

She continued to scream, breathless, her voice broken by sobs. "Jews, listen to me! I can see a fire! There are huge flames! It is a furnace!"

It was as though she were possessed by an evil spirit which spoke from the depths of her being.

We tried to explain it away, more to calm ourselves and to recover our own breath than to comfort her. "She must be very thirsty, poor thing! That's why she keeps talking about a fire devouring her."

But it was in vain. Our terror was about to burst the sides of the train. Our nerves were at breaking point. Our flesh was creeping. It was as though madness were taking possession of us all. We could stand it no longer. Some of the young men forced her to sit down, tied her up, and put a gag in her mouth.
Silence again. The little boy sat down by his mother, crying. I had begun to breathe normally.

We could hear the wheels churning out that monotonous rhythm of a train traveling through
the night. We could begin to doze, to rest, to dream.

An hour or two went by like this. Then another scream took our breath away. The woman
had broken loose from her bonds and was crying out more loudly than ever: "Look at the
fire! Flames, flames everywhere...."

Once more the young men tied her up and gagged her. They even struck her. People
encouraged them:

"Make her be quiet! She's mad! Shut her up! She's not the only one. She can keep her mouth
shut...."

They struck her several times on the head--blows that might have killed her. Her little boy clung
to her; he did not cry out; he did not say a word. He was not even weeping now.

An endless night. Toward dawn, Madame Schacht calmed down. Crouched in her corner, her
bewildered gaze scouring the emptiness, she could no longer see us.

She stayed like that all through the day, dumb, absent, isolated among us. As soon as night fell, she
began to scream: "There's a fire over there!" She would point at a spot in space, always the same
one. They were tired of hitting her. The heat, the thirst, the pestilential stench, the suffocating lack
of air--these were as nothing compared with these screams which tore us to shreds. A few days
more and we should all have started to scream too.

But we had reached a station. Those who were next to the windows told us its name: "Auschwitz."

No one had ever heard that name.

The train did not start up again. The afternoon passed slowly. Then the wagon doors slid
open. Two men were allowed to get down to fetch water.

When they came back, they told us that, in exchange for a gold watch, they had discovered
that this was the last stop. We would be getting out here. There was a labor camp. Conditions were
good. Families would not be split up. Only the young people would go to work in the factories. The
old men and invalids would be kept occupied in the fields.

The barometer of confidence soared. Here was a sudden release from the terrors of the previous
nights. We gave thanks to God.

Madame Schacht stayed in her corner, wilted, dumb, indifferent to the general confidence. Her little
boy stroked her hand.

As dusk fell, darkness gathered inside the wagon. We started to eat our last provisions. At ten in the
evening, everyone was looking for a convenient position in which to sleep for a while, and soon we
were all asleep. Suddenly: "The fire! The furnace! Look, over there! ..."

Waking with a start, we rushed to the window. Yet again we had believed her, even if only for a
moment. But there was nothing outside save the darkness of night. With shame in our souls, we
went back to our places, gnawed by fear, in spite of ourselves. As she continued to scream, they
began to hit her again, and it was with the greatest difficulty that they silenced her.

The man in charge of our wagon called a German officer who was walking about on the platform,
and asked him if Madame Schacht could be taken to the hospital car.

"You must be patient," the German replied. "She'll be taken there soon."
Toward eleven o'clock, the train began to move. We pressed against the windows. The convoy was moving slowly. A quarter of an hour later, it slowed down again. Through the windows we could see barbed wire; we realized that this must be the camp.

We had forgotten the existence of Madame Schacht. Suddenly, we heard terrible screams "Jews, look! Look through the window! Flames! Look!"

And as the train stopped, we saw this time that flames were gushing out of a tall chimney into the black sky.

Madame Schacht was silent herself. Once more she had become dumb, indifferent, absent, and had gone back to her corner.

We looked at the flames in the darkness. There was an abominable odor floating in the air. Suddenly, our doors opened. Some odd-looking characters, dressed in striped shirts and black trousers leapt into the wagon. They held electric torches and truncheons. They began to strike out to right and left, shouting:

"Everybody get out! Everyone out of the wagon! Quickly!"

We jumped out. I threw a last glance toward Madame Schacht. Her little boy was holding her hand.

In front of us flames. In the air that smell of burning flesh. It must have been about midnight. We had arrived— at Birkenau, reception center for Auschwitz.