

Review of Night/Novel Summary

Section I Wiesel relates the story of Moshe the Beadle, the caretaker at the Hasidic Synagogue. He became Wiesel's mentor, and under him he studied the Talmud and delved into the world of Jewish mysticism through the Cabbala. Then one day, all foreign Jews were expelled, and Moshe the Beadle was among them. The Jews had been taken to Polish territory, where the Gestapo had murdered all of them, except Moshe. He had miraculously escaped the mass murder by pretending he was dead, after only having been shot in the leg. He returned to Sighet to tell his story, but no one wanted to believe him, thinking he was just trying to get sympathy or that he had gone mad. [Perhaps it is because of the reaction of the people of Sighet to the story told by Moshe the Beadle that Wiesel refused to tell his story for over ten years after liberation.] Wiesel asked his father to sell out and move to Palestine. He refused, saying he was too old to start all over again. The people of Sighet didn't believe that Hitler would get as far as their town, figuring the Nazis would stay in Budapest. They seemed to be living in denial. Rights were taken away from the Jews under pain of death, and soon they were moved into the ghettos, living in deplorable conditions. Wiesel describes the suffering of the Jews as they are deported from the ghetto to the concentration camp.

Section II Elie and his family are taken away in a cattle car among eighty people, with little water, a few loaves of bread, and no room to sit down. They are told to give up all valuables or be shot. Madame Schächter is aboard and has gone mad. She was separated from her husband and two eldest sons by accident. She continually calls out about fire and flames and smoke, screaming and wailing, upsetting everyone in the cattle car. To silence her, some of the deportees begin to strike her with blows that could have killed her. They arrive at Auschwitz where they will stay. As the train stops, Madame Schächter screams once again to look out the windows. This time, there truly are flames and smoke coming out a chimney into a black sky, and an abominable odor to accompany it. Her vision was foretelling.

Section III They depart the train, leaving all their possessions behind. Immediately, selection begins, "Men to the left! Women to the right!" Elie is able to stay with his father, and a prisoner tells him to say he is eighteen, rather than his real age of fifteen, and his father is told to say he is forty, not fifty years old. Some of the prisoners begin to expound the realities of the camp, telling them that they are about to be burned, frizzled away, turned to ashes. They want to revolt, but do not. Dr. Mengele does further selection, choosing those who are strong enough to work, and disposing of the others. To his ultimate horror, Elie witnesses *babies* being taken to a ditch, used for target practice, and burned. There is a larger ditch for adults nearby. The prisoners are forced to march past the ditches, and Elie believes he will be forced into the ditch to burn to death, so he tells his father that he will go for the electric wires, rather than suffer in that way. They get within two steps of the pits, and they are ordered to turn left away from them and are safe. They are taken to their barracks where they are processed, going to the barber, disinfection, showering, receiving ill-fitting clothing, getting tattooed, all at breakneck speeds, and while being beaten at the whim of those in charge. Already they are tormented by hunger and thirst. A

friend of the family comes looking for them to seek information about his wife and children. Elie lies to him, saying that they are alive and well. Then he had *real* news, and he was not heard from again. Elie and his father speculate about the condition of Elie's mother and sister, and each tries to assuage the worries of the other.

Section IV They move on to Buna, another Concentration Camp. Elie is asked to give up his shoes in exchange for a good unit or an extra ration of bread. He refuses, but loses his shoes anyway, in exchange for nothing. They are sent for medical exams and to the dentist who is looking, not for teeth in need of repair, but for gold crowns. Elie befriends Yossi and Tibi, two brothers attached to their group and whose parents were exterminated at Birkenau. Again, Elie is summoned to the dentist for extraction of his gold crown. He makes up a story to hold the dentist off from taking his tooth, and is given permission to leave. Elie is given a job at a warehouse, where he befriends a French girl who speaks no German —Elie speaks no French. Idek, a Kapo, is taken with a bout of frenzy, and takes to beating Elie. The French girl then speaks to Elie *in near-perfect German*. [Years later, he meets her in the Metro and they spend the whole evening reminiscing. She was Jewish, but passed for Aryan, and that is how she survived.] The foreman, Franek, tells Elie to give him his gold crown. Elie refuses, so Franek begins to torment his father. Elie tells him that if he will leave his father alone, he will give him the tooth. Because he made Franek wait, Franek made him give *him* a ration of bread as well as his tooth. Elie accidentally sees Idek in a compromising position with a girl, and Idek makes an example of him, beating him with a whip in front of everyone. One Sunday, air raid sirens begin to wail, and a man takes advantage of it by trying to steal some soup. He ends up dead. A week later the gallows is set up in the assembly place to punish a young man who stole during the alert. Everyone is forced to march past his newly hanged body, looking him full in the face. Three other prisoners are sentenced to hang, one of them a 13-year-old *pipel*. The child dies slowly, not weighing enough to bring about his quick demise. ↑“That night the soup tasted like corpses.”

Section V The eve of Rosh Hashanah, the last night of the year.... Would it be their last day? Elie begins to strongly reject his God, believing that He would protect them from this Hell if He really cared. At the service, everyone recites the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. Yom Kippur—should they fast? They fast every day! And as a “New Year→’s gift” the SS treats them to another selection. How would Elie→’s father survive? He had aged so much. The selection begins, and it is a race for life. The boys run around to help the color return to their cheeks, and check with each other to see if they have been written down by Dr. Mengele. Everyone is told not to worry, that all of them are safe. Several days later, those whose numbers had been taken are told to stay behind at the camp when the others move out. Elie's father is among them. He gives his knife to Elie, telling him he no longer will need it. Elie will not take “his inheritance.” They march outside the gates, leaving his father behind. He worries all day about him, and when they return that afternoon, somehow he is still alive! In January, Elie's foot swells, and he goes to the hospital, where they tell him he needs surgery. He is warned by a patient there, “the faceless one,” that he should not stay there, that they will just exterminate him if he is not well. Elie doesn't trust the

man, but heeds his message. Meanwhile, Elie undergoes minor surgery for infection in his foot. Just two days later, they are forced to evacuate because the Red Army is on their heels. "The faceless one" tells him to get out, that all the patients in the hospital will be summarily killed and sent to the crematory. Elie decides to go along with those evacuating. [Elie learns after the war that those who stayed behind in the hospital were quite simply liberated by the Russians two days after the evacuation.]

Section VI The march begins, and the prisoners are forced to run as fast as their legs can carry them. Those who could not keep up were to be shot. Men fall down, crying, some are shot, and Elie's foot is a spurt of red flame. He wills himself not to feel anything. Their legs move mechanically as they pass the 42 mile mark. They are allowed to rest, and go to an old dilapidated brick factory, where hundreds of prisoners try to crowd in the door. Men are crushed, trampled underfoot, dying, and no one pays any attention. Elie imagines himself a corpse in just a matter of hours. To sleep would mean to die. Rabbi Eliahou comes in looking for his son, whom he lost track of on the run. Elie remembers seeing him run to the front away from his father, letting the distance between them grow. A terrible thought occurs to Elie—he had *wanted* to get rid of his father to improve his chances of survival. Elie is horrified! How could he do that? On their arrival at Gleiwitz, they are installed in barracks, where they are just a mass of bodies. Men are lying atop one another, and again, crushing and suffocating each other. Juliek and his violin are at the bottom of the heap and somehow manage to get out. Juliek plays his violin to the dying men, and in the morning, Elie finds his violin smashed and Juliek dead. Another selection, and Elie's father is sent to the left! Elie runs to his father and an SS guard shouts after him, and in the confusion, he is able to bring his father back to the right, saving him once more. They are forced to leave the camp and forbidden to even bend down as they wait for the train to take them away. Hours later a train of cattle wagons with no roofs arrives and embarkation complete, the journey begins.

Section VII On the train again, bodies are slumped against one another, as Elie tries to distinguish those who are still alive from those who are gone. The train stops in a deserted field, and the prisoners are ordered to throw out all the corpses. Elie's father is mistaken for dead, and as Elie tries to waken him, he has to fight the others so he will not be expelled from the train. Some Germans take pleasure in throwing bits of bread into the train and there is a stampede for it, with men fighting each other to the death for a mouthful. One man manages to get some bread for himself and his son, but his son throws himself upon his father to take it from him. The father dies, the son gets the bread, and soon two others take the bread from him, killing him. Elie is nearly strangled to death, but Meir Katz helps his father rescue him. Moaning is everywhere. Hundreds of cries rise up simultaneously, feeling the end is upon them. Only a dozen of the one hundred on the train got out alive.

Section VIII Buchenwald. A hot shower and some rest. But hundreds of prisoners crowd around there. Elie's father begs him to leave him to rest in the snow—he can't go on. There are corpses lying about who also wanted just to rest. An alert— everyone is moved into the barracks. To sleep is all that matters, and when Elie awakens, he thinks of his father, on the brink of death, as he has abandoned him. He goes to look for him, hoping he will not find him, so that he can save his strength to struggle for his own survival. Immediately, he feels ashamed of himself—ashamed forever. When he finds him he brings him some coffee, but he has had nothing to eat, because they "should die soon anyway.↓" His father grows weaker day by day, until Elie finally asks for a doctor to help him. He will not. Some others hit his father and take his bread. He begs for some water, and an officer quiets him with a violent blow to the head. Next morning, his father has been removed, having died during the night.

Section IX After his father's death, Elie is transferred to the children's block, and he has but one desire—to eat. An order is sent over the loudspeakers—All Jews to the assembly place. Ten blocks of deportees would be evacuated each day. Every day several thousand prisoners left the camp never to return. By April 10, there were still about 20,000 left in camp, who were all going to be evacuated at once. Afterward, they would blow up the camp. The sirens went off and they returned to the blocks. The "resistance" took charge of running the camp, and at 6:00 p.m. the first American tank stood at the gates of Buchenwald. [Just after liberation, Elie, stricken with food poisoning, spent two weeks in the hospital, hovering between life and death.]