

# Young Minds Short Story Competition 2021

Category: Year 7-9 – WINNER

Nicky Barnwell

Your Turn

“Did you know that I survived a war?” I asked. There was a reason why I have never told this story before - to anyone - and certainly not my grandchildren. I don’t want to frighten them. Daisy climbed onto my lap and Amelia cuddled up. The seven candles on the menorah cast a warm light over us. I guess if there’s a time to tell this story, it is at Hannukah. I was Jewish after all.

“I was four when the war began. We lived a simple life in Dukla, the forest as our playground. We didn’t know what was happening at first. They came for us because we were Jewish, and they left a trail of despair in their wake. Those who had hidden with us in the bunker waited for the people who were taken. Parents. Brothers. Sisters. Neighbours. Friends. I held on to Dziadek - your great, great Dziadek- just like you’re both holding on to me now, scared that if I let him go, I might lose him too. He told me we would be ok. I wanted to believe him but the look in everyone’s eyes told me otherwise.” “Why were they coming for you Babcia?” Amelia asked. I smiled fondly at her; she was so young, so helpless. Tears came to my eyes. “I don’t know Amelia, I never got to find out”

“We stayed in that bunker for three years, my sister Adela and Eliza, my grandparents Babcia and Dziadek and my parents Makta and Ojciec. My sisters and I used to play games and sing songs, but we had to be deathly quiet when the Nazis were there. We only went out for food, and we gave Babcia and Dziadek the most because they were weakest. Ojciec was the only one allowed to go out. My sisters and I used to steal a glimpse of the outside world before the door closed behind him. It was pretty, and we missed playing in it. The spring flowers, the soft snow, the rusty autumns, and the warm summers. No one knew about our bunker until the day when everything went wrong.” I heard a gasp catch in Daisy’s throat and I pulled her closer. “When Ojciec came back, he was covered in scratches and out of breath. He told us we had to leave immediately, to gather our stuff and go. We had very little, so it was ok, but leaving our bunker was just as hard as leaving our home in Dukla. We fled in panic, and it took me a moment to



realise Dziadek and Babcia weren't running with us. I turned and saw my grandparents standing at the bunker door. Their eyes locked on something to the side. They had seen the approaching soldiers before I did. I went to go back but Ojciec grabbed my hand and yelled, 'No! I am sorry, but one day you will understand'. He had tears in his eyes. As we ran, I heard one gunshot and then another. I didn't look back. I never wanted to look back."

I looked at my grandkids. "Now I understand" I said. "And I would do the same for you. We were so scared. We ran for our lives, then we heard them. They had dogs. The Nazis were coming. We hid again in the trees, my sisters and I weeping quietly. We ran, stumbling over tree roots. When night fell, we stopped, and my mother gave me her locket – our family captured inside a silver heart. I hugged her but I did not understand that would be the last time I would see her. Ojciec and I went on". I looked at the faces of my grandkids as I said that. I remembered the joy I had at their age. I remembered playing in the forest. I remembered how sad I was leaving my childhood behind. "My family forever missing." I smiled sadly and looked into Daisy and Amelia's wide eyes. "And that is the end of that story", I whispered. "And now it is your turn to start a new one".



## Mehvish Mehboob

There's something beautiful about the end of the world. In the forgotten forest where spring blows its last breath; a gentle breeze, ambers and orange steal the sky's cerulean. It's late afternoon as a mother walks down a worn pebble stone road twining through the trees. Rain is on the horizon, an ever-darkening shadow, but for now, the birds sing their last songs, and the flowers bloom a little longer. Her daughter skips ahead, dark braids catching light and glowing as sun trickles through the thickets, creating a halo around her head.

Amidst the mountains, a shepherd looks out to the prairies where sheep trot in their own oblivion. A lamb stands next to its mother, soft, snowy cotton in pure innocence. He's lived amongst the rolling hills and eternal green for years past, knowing no other life. The soil is rich in his hands, running through his fingers and he breathes in the fresh air, like sweet ichor, flowing into his lungs and through his veins. This land is his. It always was and always would be. Until it wasn't In the meadows we lay that day, hands intertwined in our forever. Flower crowns sat atop our heads, and you laughed, said it was silly, but the blossoms were in your hair too. The grass tickled our faces as the sunlight disappeared below the horizon for the final time. One by one, a myriad of diamonds glinted at us from above, as if someone had haphazardly sprinkled glitter across the sky. The fireflies were floating stars, the crickets our symphony. We danced as the wind died down to a gentle zephyr, and you held me as we gazed upon the infinite galaxy. The moon peered a little closer, yearning to feel our warmth. The next day the storms arrived, great beasts of grey with no escape, cleaving anything and everything with fury to rival ancient gods. We ran when we could, leaving behind our livelihood. You buried the agony so well, though your eyes silently dripped, but you said it was alright.

We had each other. Passing through the cliffs, there was something strangely striking about the destruction. The rain was relentless and one moment froze for eternity. A flash of lightning illuminating the sky as it struck down on our mountain before the inferno took over, hunting us down. The darkness was ablaze, roaring marigold oranges and yellow and a beast of ash was born. The creature pounced after us with claws; tendrils of smoke that wanted to slither into our lungs and choke us from inside. We made it out, until we didn't. We approached salvation, so close to our promised future in a new life. The unknown awaited. Still better than nothing. We made it together, and we were going to board that ship, almost there, but so were the masses.

Before we could step aboard, you were torn apart from me, our forever cutting short and my heart splintered. You were gone, and I was alone, watching you drift further and further away. They call this new world "Aether," but life is a prison of aluminium and quartz glass, of promised futures and everlasting hope. In the inky blackness, I have found the answer to where lost things and lost dreams go. To a world where even the stars stare back with despair. Sometimes I still hear your voice, see your shadow. My cheeks press against the glass. It's warm inside, but my body shivers in absolute zero. In this world, all that's left is a desolate void and the stars are no less empty than I. I relive the day I left you, as Earth wept, and you were nothing but a small fleck in the distance. I followed you through my kaleidoscope of



relinquished hope, and I saw a shattered world of clementine skies and fractured obsidian hearts.

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