



VIVIEN LIU

Secrets Under the Wildflowers

A gunshot is what interrupted my dreams of fantasy, of the day when the mundane gray walls fall, and when my people and I can walk with our heads held high, to a place where we have things that belong to us, and where the military isn't allowed in our homes. It's been the fourth time this week that such a thought has passed through my mind, and as much I try to submerge it and dunk it back into the deepest, darkest depths of my mind, it finds its way back, dangerously close to making me go insane and lose what little piece of sanity and realism I have left in me.

Shots are common here; it'd be more a surprise if we weren't awoken with such a noise, if someone didn't die a gruesome death while the rest of the ghetto is sleeping in their cots, underneath thin, worn blankets and nonexistent pillows to rest our aching, lice-infested heads.

The sun has yet to awaken from its bed in between the green grass and the still- navy sky, but, in the distance, I can see the ghetto that we live in is stirring. We wake every morning and wonder why we're here. They claim we committed an unforgivable crime.

We have yet to figure out our wrongdoings.

Carefully, delicately, almost as if I'm stroking nothingness, I subconsciously trace the numbers that were etched into my skin in a time long before today, covering my wrist, marking me as 'Nazi Property'. Those who choose to steal 'Nazi Property' will be charged for theft, and will face dire consequences. Even we know that means whoever tries to help us will die.

"Get up!" A voice, weathered from excessive use, screams from outside the door. Apparently, our Jewish infection is so terrible and contagious that the soldier stationed outside our door cannot even bear to come in, and has no other option but to stand outside our door, and scream from a distance. And though it's a blow to my ego, to our ego, I can't help but feel slightly relieved that the soldier did not burst through the doors, and personally witness the pitiful mess we call our home, or have to face the weak crumple of skin and bones with no identification besides the numbers that are imprinted into our skin. It's impossible to believe that just months ago, these people, including myself, were just your average, every day people who one might have seen while taking a walk. But now, we are no longer your average, every day people who one might see while taking a walk. Instead, we're the pitiful sight that belongs in Hell, not here, where the beauty of life still roams, but in the Devil's Home, where life is nothing more than a fading memory, replaced by searing pain.

I almost fall when the musty gray lunch tray is shoved in my face, and can't help but cringe when I see a dollop of blue porridge on my tray, with a piece of stale bread the size of my fist resting not-too far from the mush. And though it looks (and is) quite disgusting, I almost moan in pure ecstasy when the food enters my mouth and provides me what little energy I'm able to get out of such a portion. There's no time to savor the

Vivien Liu
The Village School, 8th grade

2nd Prize Winner of TSH MS Tagore Project

taste of moldy porridge and stale bread; there's a day ahead of us, so if you don't want to get sent off to the experiments and the chamber, you better get your little ass up and move, do you hear me?

Yes, we always hear you. Yes, we always listen to you. Yes, I'm getting up. There's no more pride in this game; survival is a matter of who can rid themselves of their ego the best.

We understand. I understand. Get up.

With an aching back and blistering feet, I place my hands over the splintering wood in an attempt to heave my body up. This has become a daily ritual; someone always falls at the dining table, much like how someone always falls in the dead of the night. But I never dreamed that someone would be me.

I cannot get up. I'll die. But I have not lost.

The last glimpse I get is of withering patches of yellow grass sprinkled all over the wide field where countless bodies lay, lost like mine, their silence almost daunting; my death shall have the same effect. Because, mark my words, when they come, it'll all be over. Our deaths will be justified, our voices shall never be forgotten; they shall ring in your ears forevermore, as we lay here, rotting with our brothers. We shall not rest until the fire has passed, quenched by the wildflowers that grow over us.

We need not wreaths, we need not tears.

When the mind is led forward by thee, into ever-widening thought and action, into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awaken.