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S.S. Schatten Schmidt

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S.S. Schatten Schmidt
Emma Albers-Lopez

Every morning I wake,
I slip my feet into my boots and tie them up,
My hair gets slicked back to fit regulations,
My jacket gets buttoned and my tie gets a clean knot.

I take a look in the mirror,
The picture is no longer a man,
The figure before me is a shadow of a man,
A shadow of a good man,
A shadow with a swastika attached to its sleeve.

The shadow puts down its morals and picks up a rifle,
It glides into Auschwitz,
Sulking around the grounds,
Devouring every trace of humanity,
Until it hears the sound of music.

The figure becomes a man,
That man morphs into me,
I walk over to the Music Block and stand outside,
The souls of the walking corpses are playing.

I peek in to see their hunger disappear,
They look alive, unlike any other prisoner in this Hell,
The music bounces off their instruments into their lungs to make them inflate,
The music is....

“SS Obersturmbahnführer Schmidt! Kommen sie hier!”

Though my name is shouted I disappear once again,
The shadow scurries to its duties,
It floats above the many people destined for death,
Threatening just that if they don't work fast enough,
It screams “Schneller! Schneller! Du bist Schwein!”,
I scream “Stöp! Stöp! Sie sind Menschen!”

The work day comes to a halt,
The shadow arranges the figures composed of skin and bones in straight lines,
They are forced to march back singing “Im Auschwitz- Lager bin ich zwar”,
I stay ahead so I don't have to watch the dissonance of words,
The shadow finds it entertaining,
Yet, this is not music.

This forced statement with pitches is the worst they endure,
Somehow they can deal with hunger, disease, and exhaustion,
But destroying the only thing fueling their soul is how they are dying.

They are not allowed to go back to their barrack just yet,
I don't know how they don't collapse on the spot,
I'm exhausted and I've done nothing,
The shadow is hitting a man because he is out of formation.

The orchestra concludes the march for the return of the workers,
But the noise doesn't cease,
Everyone hears a drum banging in the middle of the formation,
Then a shout of "Hurra, Hurra, ich bin wieder da!"
Defeat rushes out of all the prisoners.

They hoped that this runaway would get away,
This man was the chance to spread the horrors of what was happening here,
Once again that hope is crushed as he is led to the gallows,
He walks up,
The orchestra is playing a piece not resembling music,
And then one more slice of hope is asphyxiated.

I can't understand this evil,
One more death among millions,
Death amongst the purest thing on this earth,
Murder among music,
An unfathomable outrage.

I remember back to listening to the orchestra away from the other SS's ears,
They were nourishing their souls,
But this... this outrage which they call "accompaniment to death",
It is the worst form of offence,
And yet, I remain silent.

The day is finally over,
The shadow walks into my home,
It looks at my wife and children at the table,
My children are wearing their red and white clothes,
My wife sees only the shadow and she is wondering where I am.

The shadow walks up to my room where he unties his tie and removes his jacket,
I start seeing myself in the mirror as I run my fingers through my hair to get it out of regulations,
My boots come off and I sit them by my bedside.

I finally see myself after a long day of looking at the shadow,
I also see the many prisoners who will pass in the night,
I am the cause for their suffering and yet I empathize with them,
They are sisters and brothers,
Mothers and Fathers,
Husbands and Wives,
Friends and Neighbors,
But most importantly, they are human beings,
They don't deserve this.

The shadow is not who I used to be,
The shadow is not who I want to be.

I am the man whose wife steals Nazi flags to make clothes for our six children,
Six children which should have been seven,
My youngest is dead because of people like my shadow,

Meine Schatzi was killed because of her disability,
She was merely a week old in the nursery of the hospital,
The staff said she had died in her sleep,
How is that true when another fifteen disabled were killed the same night in that very hospital?

Now I sit where the murderers of my child sat,
I'm here pretending that a shadow is doing all this evil,
When the truth is,
I am.

I am doing it all,
I kill the innocent,
People as innocent as my daughter,
I do it so I won't be sent to the camp,
I do it so my family won't be gassed,
What was my other choice?

There was none,
It was the Reich or the camp,
Pick one,
It was as "simple" as that.

I am the coward,
I am sitting in silence,
Diligently following orders,
And that's how this will continue.

I say nothing,
They say nothing,
Everyone knows nothing,
And we will be left with nothing.

Works Referenced

Gilbert, Shirli. *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.