I am wondering how it can only be October if such a cold is settling into my bones. I am being forced forward, my Uncle in front of me and the rest of our family far behind, closer and closer to embrace of Death’s cold hands and perhaps God’s forgiving grace. We are slogging slowly through the mud of the forest floor, and I wish fervently that it would swallow me up before I must dig my own grave and watch my family lie in it with me. I remember writing once that I would never come here, the Ponar Forest, but those words mock me now. I can hear the shovels now, I can see their wielders. Others like my family, stripped of clothing and any dignity they had remaining, digging a hole large enough to fill the clearing in the trees. I pause for but a moment and the butt of a Nazi Rifle hits me suddenly and painfully in the junction of my shoulder.

“Move along!” The older boy growls. It is a wonder to me how someone, maybe not even two years my senior, would shoot me and my family with no hesitation. How he, a boy certainly no older than eight-teen, would kill me without remorse, then bury me gladly with nothing but the mournful silicon of a Death Forest to mark our mass grave. Murder, at it’s finest. No, not murder, for to them I am not human, am I? But a slaughter.

Genocide.

I do not listen immediately, anger broiling n my gut and foolish fancy influencing my thoughts. But the rifle comes down once more, this time into my face, and breaks my nose with a sickening crunch and my own cry of pain. I swear, and the older blonde boy spits in my face
contemptuously. “Move along, Jewish filth,” he repeats. And this time, I walk. I stagger, I should say, slowly and torturously to my own death, to my grave.

I have heard the old gossips in the Ghetto say that Death is grim company, but at this moment, I selfishly wish for even his cold skeletal touch. None of the others dare come near me, even to check on my nose, for fear they too will be beaten. Perhaps even to death. Beaten or not, however, death is not far off for any of us here. I was once a very proud person, but now I have been brought low—they force a shovel into my hands and push me towards the hole; I stumble as my feel slide down the side. In surprise, I gasp, and the metallic taste of my own blood makes me gag.

“Shut up!” Another boy hisses from beside me. “You’ll get us both killed!”

“Killed?” I hiss back, “We’re already digging our own grave, what difference does a few minutest make to your mind?” But soon, anger leaves me, and all that is left is child-like fear.

Ignoring me, he continues digging, and I follow suit. We dig for hours. I wish the sun was not blocked by clouds. I wish this war had never started. I wish Hitler—the filth!—had never been born. I wish for a lot of things. But soon I hear the shots, startled screams. I dare not turn, I dare not stop digging. Bodies fall, I hear my father swear before he is abruptly silenced. I hear people begin to cry, I hear someone being kicked down the sides of the hole. A body falls beside my feet and the shots continue. Tears feel my eyes. I will be next, I know. Will it hurt? Will I feel it at all? God—god why is this happening to me? To us? What have we done—oh god there’s not many left—dare I even ask for your forgiveness? I’m sorry! Yitgadal v’yitkadesh sh’mei raba. B’alma di v’ra chirutei, v’yamlich malchutei, b’chayeichon uv’yomeichon uv’yomeichon uv’chayei d’chol beit Yisrael, baagala uviz”man ka—There is pain.
I lose my breath.

My knees hit the ground.

There is silence.