

Eva Heyman on the Ghettoization of the Jews in Hungary

Eva Heyman was 13 years old when she started writing her diary. She was brought up in a secular bourgeoisie family in Hungary. Eva started writing her diary in February 1944 and continued writing until May 1944, the day she was deported to Auschwitz. She died on October 17th, 1944.

May 5, 1944

Dear diary, now you aren't at 3 Istvan Gyönyöosi Street – that is, at home – any more, not even at Anikó's, nor at Tusnád, nor at Lake Balton, nor in Budapest, places you've been with me too before, but in the ghetto. Three days we waited for them to come and get us. There we sat in the apartment and watched for the policemen. Ági and Grandpa went out into the street between nine and ten in the morning to hear the latest news. The city was divided into sections, and a German truck would wait in front of the houses and two policemen would go into the apartments and bring the people out. The notices tell what we can take with us. Dear diary, I'm still too little a girl to write down what I felt while we waited to be taken into the ghetto. Between one order and the next, Ági would cry out that we deserve what we get because we are like animals, patiently waiting to be slaughtered in the slaughterhouse. But now and then, after Ági burst into such an outcry, Grandma Rácz would have an attack, and then Ági would calm down. And there was such silence, dear diary; even Mandi didn't sing. But it wasn't silent the way it usually is at night, but of a kind that I couldn't even imagine till now, from time to time, when the bell rang, I would be almost happy. I knew that we were being taken to the ghetto, but felt that if this silence would go on much longer we would all go crazy. Then everything happened like in a film.

The two policemen who came to us weren't unfriendly; they just took Grandma's and Ági's wedding rings away from them. Ági was shaking all over and couldn't get the wedding ring off her finger. In the end, Grandma took the ring off her finger. Then they checked our luggage and they didn't allow us to take Grandpa's valise because it is genuine pigskin. They didn't allow

anything made of leather to be taken along. They said: There is a war going on and the soldiers need the leather. They also didn't allow me to take my red purse. We took washing kits and Grandma's thick cloth bag.

One of the policemen saw a little gold chain on my neck, the one I got for my birthday, the one holding your key, dear diary. Don't you know yet, the policeman said, that you aren't allowed to keep anything made of gold?! This isn't private Jewish property anymore but national property! Whenever something was being taken from us, Ági would always pretend not to notice at all, because she had an obsession about not letting the policemen think that it bothered us that our things were being taken, but this time she begged the policeman to let me keep the little gold chain. She started sobbing and saying: Mr. Inspector, please go and ask your colleagues, and they will tell you that I have never begged for anything, but please let the child keep just this little gold chain. You see, she keeps the key to her diary on it. Please, the policeman said, that is impossible; in the ghetto you will be checked again. I, so help me God, don't need this chain or any other object that is being taken from you. I don't need any of it, but I don't want any difficulties. I am a married man. My wife is going to have a baby. I gave him the chain. In Grandma's night table I found a velvet ribbon. I asked the policeman: Mr. Inspector, may I take a velvet ribbon along to the ghetto? He said I could. Now your key hangs on that velvet ribbon, dear diary.

Later it rained, and Aunt Nisi's beautiful furniture got wet in the garden outside. But she said she didn't care; everything could rot, because anyway it was all going to belong to somebody else! Pista Vadas let me sit on the window sill, the only place where there was still some room. I looked at Ági, curious to know what she thought about the whole thing, but she wasn't paying attention to anything and worried only about where Grandpa and Grandma and Uncle Béla would sleep. At first, Chief Rabbi Vajdas said that the women and children should be separated from the men. But then none of the women wanted to leave their husbands, and the women said that we could undress in the dark, and that every effort should be made for families to sleep together. We were put in a room that had been used as an office. The bookshelves were sunk into the walls so it was impossible to take them out to

the yard. The shelves are packed full of books. Uncle Béla said: I hope we shall manage to read them all till the end of the war. In the evening we wanted to turn on the lights, but it turned out that City Hall had cut off the electricity, because Jews aren't entitled to electricity. Still, everybody somehow found a place, only nobody ate supper, because, of course, nobody thought that we would be left in the dark.

Source: *The Diary of Eva Heyman*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1974, pp. 84-88.