

Writing sample:

4. The round-up

15th-16th October 1943

After sunset on Friday, October 15, the streets and alleys in the old ghetto were almost deserted. The Sabbath had begun. It was also in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). The Jews wanted to be at home to welcome the Sabbath with their loved ones. Only a few were on the road to organize something or to bring back food.

The brief shouting of the old Signora Celeste, who had crossed from Trastevere and warned against the Germans, was quickly forgotten.¹ The old woman was thought to be meshuga. The Germans had the gold they had requested; they had plundered the offices of the Jewish community in addition to the library - what more could they want? The handover of the gold was more than a fortnight ago. Since then, SS Chief Kappler had not expressed a new threat.² The soldiers of the Wehrmacht in Rome also acted unobtrusively. They were only seen on patrols and at check points. They did not seem interested in the Jews.

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SS in the old ghetto and all over Rome

In the early morning on Saturday, only a few people got out of their beds; those who wanted to get the weekly tobacco ration and be well ahead of the line had to start soon. One of them was the grandfather of the young Giacomo di Porto. Giacomo and his wife Eleonora lived with his parents close to the grandfather. At about four o'clock

a.m., the young couple and the parents were suddenly awakened by a loud knock on the door. It was the grandfather. He shouted urgently into the apartment: "Hurry! Hurry! Escape, if you can!"³ When the old man had been standing in front of a tobacconist at such an early hour, he had suddenly noticed that German military trucks were heading toward the ghetto. Di Porto had reacted quickly and ran to his loved ones. The trucks could only mean one thing: a raid among the Jews.

Since 5:30 a.m., the raid began routinely. It was a cold, rainy morning. Various testimonies of non-Jewish passers-by, residents, and successfully escaped Jews described in detail the scenarios that took place on this morning.

Simultaneously, small groups of commandos entered the houses in several parts of the ghetto and banged with their rifle butts on every door. The orders in German were not understood, but everyone knew immediately what was going on. Many people were still sleeping and were literally taken out of their beds. The soldiers held lists in their hands with the names of Jewish individuals or families and their addresses. Dannecker had distributed this information among the squads. The names and the addresses came from his list, which he had laboriously prepared for the last fourteen days.

Some houses in the ghetto were almost completely emptied. Because of this, non-Jewish families were also caught by the soldiers. Only persons who were lucky or who could prove that they were not on the list got away scot-free. At the apartment doors, horrified people were handed bilingual pieces of paper or someone had to read aloud the following text:⁴

You and your family and all other Jews belonging to your household are to be interned.

You have to bring with you: food for at least eight days; ration cards; identity cards; and cups.

You may also bring a small suitcase with clothes, blankets, etc., money, and jewelry.

Lock the apartments. Take the key with you.

Invalids, even the severest cases, may not remain behind for any reason.

There are infirmaries at the camp.

Twenty minutes after showing this card, the family must be ready to depart.

Many of the scared residents reacted in panic. What had to be done now? Could they still escape? Where would they be taken to? Were they perhaps allowed to come back again to get necessary things? After the first shock, hectic activity broke out. For babies, children, old, and sick people had to be taken care of. Very often there was not enough food in the house. What valuables should they take with them? The bags or suitcases did not fit enough clothes and blankets. The twenty minutes passed so fast that many people did not have any time to put on warm clothes. The SS soldiers made them hurry up, and they did not spare rude words.

There are shattering reports from eyewitnesses about the brutality, about the despair, the angst, and the madness during these hours. Some of the adults, among the first ones who had been arrested, were still dressed in their nightdresses or only in a jacket. From different directions of the streets in the ghetto, groups of people of all ages were driven toward the Theatre of Marcellus. There were many families among them who soothed their children and who paid attention not to lose their old or sick ones.

Soldiers watched over the groups. From time to time, they hit some of the people with their rifle butts back in line and drove them on loudly. The arrested were frightened and disturbed. Some cried or whined softly. Others tried to make the soldiers feel sorry for them. However, with very rare exceptions, there was no pity for the arrested.

Outside the ghetto, there were mobile squads all over Rome. They checked individual addresses where Jews should live, according to their list. The sergeant of the 5th Company of the SS Polizeiregiment 15, who was ordered to complete the round-up, said in a later interrogation:

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