1. The Summary of Night

It is important to remember that Night is not a novel but a memoir. These events really happened. Eliezer is the young Elie Wiesel, who experienced all these things himself. In the beginning, Wiesel the author creates a picture of a harmonious Jewish community in Sighet that is held together by age-old religious beliefs and traditions in which the synagogue is the center of community life. Eliezer is a serious, religious boy who studies. This is an ominous foreshadowing of what is to come, and a reminder that the story of the Jewish people is the story of suffering. Eliezer has a mystical side to his mind, since he is eager to study Cabbala, even though his father says it is better to wait until he is an adult. Eliezer's initial enthusiasm for religion is an important theme of the story, since it will soon be put to the severest test. Moche tells him that "Man raises himself toward God by the questions he asks Him." He adds that man does not understand the answers God gives to him. "You will find the true answers, Eliezer, only within yourself!" he says. Eliezer, with the optimism that at the moment he has no cause to doubt, believes that Moche will draw him into eternity, "into that time where question and answer would become one." Never again during the book will he permit himself such confident statements. He will ask questions of God, just as Moche says, but there will be no answers, either from God or from within Eliezer's mind and heart. The section emphasizes how reluctant the Jews of Sighet are to envision the worst. At every point, they put the best possible face on unfolding events. They refuse to believe that Hitler intends to annihilate the Jews. When Moche the Beadle, the wise man and prophet, warns them of their fate, no one listens. He is
like a Biblical prophet crying in the wilderness. No one believes him, but his words are true. This demonstrates how unimaginable the Holocaust was. The events recorded in the book are so horrifying that they defeat any attempt to explain them. No one could really believe it was happening until they were caught up in it themselves.

Moche the Beadle played the role of the wise prophet whom no one believes, in this section Madame Schachter plays the role of the mad prophet, also whom no one believes. She seems merely delirious when she screams that she sees a fire and huge flames coming from a furnace. But she is proved correct, and that is exactly what the prisoners see when they first arrive at Auschwitz, which was one of the most terrible of the Nazi death camps. For the first time, the Jews are forced to acknowledge the full horror of what is happening to them. The motif of fire will become a recurring one throughout the book.

There is also a foreshadowing in this section of the inhumanity that will later overtake almost everyone, oppressors and victims alike. As the Jews set out for their ride in the cattle wagon, civility prevails. There is not enough room for everyone to sit down, so they take turns at sitting. When Madame Schachter begins to shout about fire, someone puts a damp cloth on her forehead, to calm her, and some of the women try to comfort her. But as her screams continue, people lose patience with her: "It was as though madness were taking possession of us all." Two men tie her up and put a gag in her mouth, and the others encourage them. She is also beaten about the head. The cruelty of the Nazis is being copied by their victims.

Bit by bit, the Jews are stripped of all their former identity. They have already had to hand over their valuables. Now the women are separated from the men, leaving Eliezer
with only his father. His only thought is to hang on to his father, so he will not be alone. This thought is with him all time during these first days at the camp.

Eliezer realizes that in such a short period of time, everything has changed. He is no longer the person he was a few days ago. His former identity has been obliterated: "I too had become a completely different person. The student of the Talmud, the child that I was, had been consumed in the flames. There remained only a shape that looked like me. A dark flame had entered into my soul and devoured it." The removal of all former identity was a deliberate policy of the Nazis in the death camps. This is why the prisoners are made anonymous, identified only by the numbers tattooed on their arms. The intention was also to sever the connections between family members. Eliezer feels this is already happening. When the gypsy strikes his father, Eliezer says nothing in protest. If the attack had happened a day earlier, he thinks, he would have attacked the gypsy in retaliation, and he now feels remorse for his lack of action. Eliezer's relationship with his father, as they both try to cling on to their humanity, will become a central theme of their life in the camps.

In this section, for the first time, Eliezer begins to question his religion and the justice of God. More than that, he is in full revolt. As the other men recite the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, which includes the line, "May His Name be blessed and magnified," Eliezer thinks he has nothing to thank God for. His loss of religious faith will also be a continuing theme as the story unfolds.

This section shows the further dehumanization that occurs in the camp, and also graphically illustrates not only Eliezer's loss of faith, but even the appearance of the death of God. Dehumanization is everywhere apparent: when the Kapos choose the men they want to work for them, they point fingers "as though choosing cattle or merchandise"; at the
warehouse, the German employee in charge "paid us about as much attention as a dealer
might who was just receiving a delivery of old rags."

The psychology of the camp also continues to have a corrosive effect on Eliezer. In the
previous section, when his father was hit, he made no protest. In this section, when the
same thing happens (his father is beaten by Idek), Eliezer is angry not with Idek but with
his father, for not knowing how to avoid the beating. Because he is powerless to do
anything about it and fears being beaten himself, Eliezer's anger at the Nazis has been
displaced onto his father.

The theme of the loss of religious faith also acquires another dimension at the end of this
section. The young boy who is hanged seems in Eliezer's mind to represent the death of
God Himself. In answer to the man's question about where is God now, Eliezer thinks,
"Where is He? Here He is-He is hanging here on this gallows."

The image suggests that of the crucified Christ, but unlike in the Christian tradition, in this
case there is to be no resurrection.

Eliezer becomes like Job in the Bible. Job suffered many misfortunes and dared to
challenge God and question Him about His justice. Eliezer addresses God in his thoughts in
ways that would have been unthinkable to the religious boy who only a few months ago
lived in Sighet. "What does Your greatness mean, Lord of the Universe, in the face of all
this weakness, this decomposition, and this decay?" he asks. He continues thinking in this
vein throughout the New Year's service. Although he feels completely alone in a universe
bereft of God and without love or mercy, he gains a kind of strength in his solitude.

At the same time as he faces up to his complete loss of faith, Eliezer still manages to
maintain his humanity, which manifests in his loyalty to his father. They are joined together
by the immensity of the suffering they share. This is conveyed in the moment after the New
Year's service, when Eliezer kisses his father's hand and a tear falls upon it. Neither Eliezer nor his father know from whose eye the tear fell. It does not matter. Eliezer also demonstrates that his humanity remains intact when he elects to evacuate the camp with his father, rather than remaining behind in the infirmary. "We had already suffered so much, borne so much together; this was not the time to be separated." Thus Eliezer affirms the value and strength of the family bond, despite everything that tries to undermine it. In the remaining sections, he will face an even stern test.

Early in the march, Eliezer is tempted just to give up. He feels the attraction of death: "The idea of dying, of no longer being, began to fascinate me." The only thing that stops him from lying down in the road and letting death take him is the presence of his father. He decides that he has no right to let himself die, because then his father would be left with no support. He therefore chooses life and the bonds of family and humanity over death. Never again does he feel the temptation of death. A short while later, he makes sure he does not sleep, because he knows he would die, "and something within me revolted against this death." He will cling to life with all he has, a testament to the human spirit's will to survive.

Later in the journey, Eliezer's father will show his equal concern for Eliezer, refusing to let him sleep for fear he would never wake again. Through everything, father and son think of each other and try to help each other. It is the only answer to the brutality that surrounds them, and it recalls a line from a poem written by W. H. Auden on the eve of World War II: "We must love one another or die" (1st September, 1939). For Eliezer and his father this becomes almost a literal truth. But it will be tested to the utmost, as the story of Rabbi Eliahou and his son shows. They had stuck together for three years, but now the strain has finally showed. The son runs on, leaving his father behind. Eliezer has a terrible
thought, that the rabbi's son "had wanted to get rid of his father" because this would free him from a burden and increase his own survival chances. In such a brutal world, even the father-son bond will eventually break down. Eliezer prays (even though he no longer believes in God) that he never allows such a thing to happen to him.

The relationship between Eliezer and his father has almost been reversed. The father has become "like a child, weak, timid, vulnerable," and Eliezer has to behave like a father to him. Again, Eliezer fiercely clings on to life, while his father, Eliezer believes, chooses death. In this final episode in the father-son relationship, Eliezer briefly falls victim to the same thoughts that he believes came to Rabbi Eliahou's son—that his father is a burden, a dead weight, and if he could get rid of him, he would have a better chance of surviving. He is immediately ashamed of the thought. From that point on, apart from one small lapse when he resents giving his father some of his soup, Eliezer does everything he can to give his father hope and defend him from the assaults of the other prisoners.

At the end of the book, the Allied forces arrive at the concentration camp and liberate the prisoners. Even though he is freed, Elie is physically and emotionally devastated from his year of imprisonment. Three days after his release, he becomes seriously ill and must be hospitalized. When he has recovered enough to get out of bed, Elie looks in the mirror and thinks that he looks like a corpse. He knows he will always be haunted by the horror he has endured; the memory will forever be like a dark and scary night to him.
2. The Biography of Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel was born in Sighet, Transylvania on September 30, 1928. He had two older sisters and a younger sister named Tzipora. The town of Sighet is located in present-day Romania, although historically the area has been claimed by the people of both Hungary and Romania. Elie (short for Eliezer) grew up speaking Yiddish at home, and Hungarian, Romanian, and German outside. He also learned classical Hebrew at school. Elie's mother's family was part of the Hasidic sect of Judaism, and Elie loved the mysticism and folk tales of the sect as a child. He devoted the early years of his life to religious studies although his father encouraged him to study modern Hebrew and secular subjects also.

During the early years of World War II, Sighet remained relatively unaffected by the war. Although Sighet became controlled by the Hungarians instead of the Romanians, the Jews in Sighet believed that they would be safe from the persecution that Jews in Germany and Poland were suffering. In 1944, however, Elie and all the other Jews in the town were deported to concentration camps in Poland. Elie and his father were taken to Auschwitz, where they became separated from Elie's mother and younger sister Tzipora. Elie, who was fifteen at the time, never saw them again.

During the following year, Elie was moved to the concentration camps at Buna, Gleiwitz, and Buchenwald. He managed to stay with his father the entire time until his father's death from dysentery, starvation, exposure, and exhaustion at Buchenwald. Finally, in April 1945, Elie was liberated from Buchenwald by the United States Third Army.

After the war, Elie learned that his mother and younger sister had died in the gas chambers, but that his two older sisters had survived. Elie lived in a French orphanage for a few years and in 1948 began to study literature, philosophy, and psychology at the Sorbonne in Paris. He supported himself as a choirmaster and teacher of Hebrew, and he
became a journalist, writing for the French newspaper L'Arche and the Israeli Yediot Ahronot. Elie had vowed never to write about his Holocaust experiences, but in 1955, after meeting the French Catholic novelist and Nobel laureate Francois Mauriac, he decided to write And the World Remained Silent, a 900-page volume. The book was originally written in Yiddish and published in Buenos Aires, Argentina. After two years, it appeared again in a compressed, 127-page French version called La Nuit (Night).

In 1956 Elie Wiesel was hit by a taxicab in New York and confined to a wheelchair for almost a year. He applied for American citizenship and after recovering from his injuries, continued to live in New York as a feature writer for a Yiddish-language newspaper called the Jewish Daily Forward. He wrote an additional 35 works in French dealing primarily with Judaism and the Holocaust. His novels include L'Aube (Dawn) and Le Jour (The Accident), which are semi-autobiographical works dealing with Holocaust survivors. In La Ville de la Chance (The Town Beyond the Wall), Wiesel imagines returning to his home town, which he does only after the novel is published.

Wiesel's other novels include The Gates of the Forest, The Oath, The Testament, and The Fifth Son. He has written plays, including Zalmen, or the Madness of God and The Trial of God, and his essays and short stories are collected in the volumes Legends of Our Time, One Generation After, and A Jew Today. In addition, he has written collections of Hasidic tales and Biblical stories, and the English translation of his memoirs was published in 1995 as All Rivers Run to the Sea. Wiesel continues to write in French, but his wife Marion, who he married in 1969 and who also survived the concentration camps, collaborates with him his books' English translations. Wiesel's books on the Holocaust have helped win him an international reputation.
Wiesel became politically involved after learning about the persecution of Soviet Jews in the USSR. He first traveled to the USSR in 1965 and described the situation he observed in the volume The Jews of Silence. He has continued to plead on the behalf of oppressed peoples in the Soviet Union, South Africa, Vietnam, Biafra, and Bangladesh.

Elie Wiesel has lectured at colleges around the country and has been Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities at Boston University since 1976. In 1978 he was appointed Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council by President Jimmy Carter, and in 1985 he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement by President Ronald Reagan. In 1986 Wiesel received the Nobel Prize for Peace. Currently, Elie Wiesel lives in New York City with his wife and son Elisha.