



Historical Association
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Write your own Historical Fiction 2024

By Noà Williams

Otto

23/4/1945, 2:47

He's dead

Nothing could have prepared me for the words I had to write with my very own pen attached to my very own hand, Tagebuch, my brother is dead. And the thing is, pretty soon, that might be me too. I am so close to resembling that boy in the mud. With his face smeared with soil like some haphazard warpaint. The sky is dark with smoke as I duck into a dusty corner like a helpless sitting duck.

Am I a coward for shying from the fight, yes, I am. But, the fact remains, it is a miracle I have not been shot. This is my momentary celebration, although it could well be short-lived, nevertheless, I will cherish it. Even the birds have fled. The birds in Berlin are the bravest of the birds, the bustling city is no enemy of theirs, so that alone speaks volumes. If hiding means living, I will hide until the battle is over.

23/4/1945, 6:22

I think I might be dead. Or dying, at least. For every bomb that falls, the explosion is seemingly louder. The tired, cold sun is threatening to set as I stumble into the fragmented cathedral. The entire city resembles a cubist painting, in mismatched pieces, obscuring a sunset. It is oddly, eerily, even supernaturally beautiful. I think a crow has been following me for some time now. Maybe I'm crazy.

Maybe it's nothing but the loss of blood.

I clutch my side. Whilst fleeing with the oncoming tidal wave of soldiers, I managed to trip. I can barely remember the following events, but a drift of falling rubble pinned me down as an unexploded shell took its chance to spray the blood of a dozen boys for kilometres around. My right foot was almost severed, my body facing its own small bombardment of shards of unidentifiable debris. Some of it could have been bones for all I know, Tagebuch, but who am I to say.

All I know, I am in so much pain.

Right now, I am barely holding on to my fleeting life, my hands are shaking, I might have to leave this entry unfinished.

Goodbye Tagebuch.

*

Crow

With those final words, he slowly, closed the pocketbook, tucking it in the folds of his Hitler Youth uniform. He gripped his father's pen with one hand, his broken, bleeding body with the other. From my perch, I see a single silver tear trace the fear in his face and settle in the crevices of his chapped lips. He licks it away as he closes his eyes for a final time, savouring the light on his face. His once brown jacket is now a deep, ugly shade of crimson red as his lifeless body slumps, supported only by the crumbling wall. The corner of that decaying ruin is where he will eternally sleep. It reminded me of, some time ago, when my nest was raided by a racoon. The beast devoured four of my eggs, leaving a single chick, which was later killed by an adder. That boy was so young. If his parents still live amidst this chaos, they will feel the grief that I felt when my children were taken.

*

Elke

"Elke!" I hear a little girl call from amidst the mounds of rubble. My knees are bloody, my stockings shredded. I am a mess, as a girl would be in the middle of a fierce bombardment. Cautiously, I wipe my face of tears and loosen my grasp on mother's cold hand, after all, I could not help her.

"Elke!" She yells again, this time, weaker, quieter. Now I am certain that the girl is my sister. Then, at once, she falls silent. Her whimpering ceases. I panic. My head throbs.

"Rosa?" I plea, "Rosa!" my anxiety grows, it strangles my cries. Is she really Rosa? If she is, is she alright? Through the ringing of my ears, my legs persevere into a jog and then a sprint. Upon what is left of the trees sits a miniature blue jay. It beats its wings excitedly.

I round the corner and time seems to slow as so many people trample corpses and discarded remains of buildings. As they pass me, I see what they are running from. My hope leaves me through my open mouth as I am swallowed by the blast of another bomb. Orange and yellow and all kinds of dust engulf my body as I am charred by the heat and propelled backward. My last thoughts are of my sister. I pray for Rosa.

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Jay

The young girl that I saw running through the broken streets sinks to the ground like a paper doll. Remnants of flame cling to her as she lays, burning and broken. Her red bows resemble the colour of the blood that is spattered around her. Just left of her corpse is the place where her sister lay beneath the rubble. She is so close to me, I can hear her sniffing, whining like a puppy. Fine white dust paints her face a shade only seen upon the dead. It is sheer and clay-like where her tears have escaped her tiny, round eyes.

I leave my spot in the branches of a scorched old oak. I bob through the smoke-polluted air, passing a solitary crow nestled in the branches of another tree. I leave the disorder of the battle for a calmer countryside resting place, in a field of cows.

*

Otilie

The cellar was unbearably cold and dark, I could barely see inches in front of me. The small, shuttered windows were boarded, scrap wood nailed over them. In the opposite corner, I can hear my brother shifting. I know that he is just as afraid as I am.

Outside, I hear the muffled beating of men's boots on the dirt. I hear the rattle of bombs and the quick, careful barking of the guns. The hair on the back of my neck prickles.

I hold Emma in my arms. She softly makes her baby noises as I bounce her. I don't think I could handle her crying, so I pray that she stays quiet. Somewhere within the overtaking darkness, I hear my brother begin to stand.

"Erwin?" I mumble, I cannot help but wonder, what is he doing?

"Yes?" He whispers back, unfazed, he sounds more confident, less cowardly, I can tell he has had one of his infamous ideas.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm curious, I need to see outside."

"That's not safe, its why the door is locked, and the windows boarded. Have you not heard the gunshots and the bombs outside? The soviets will kill us."

He scuffs the floor with his shoe and pauses for a moment. Then, after brief consideration, he begins to stack several empty wine crates, each on top of each other in a precarious tower. Before I could raise myself from the floor to stop him, Emma starts to wail. She tries her handful of shrill notes at my ears, startling me. While I attempt to console her, I hear Erwin scaling his creation, grunting as he reaches for the windows.

"Erwin, no. I don't have to baby you too. You're six and should know better, come down from there!" I manage to gasp. The noise of Emma's crying has exasperated me.

"Please, Otilie, just one look! It's too dark in the cellar." He whines. This begins to frustrate me even more. I resist shouting in fear of startling the baby.

"Erwin, no! you don't understand how dangerous this is! Come down!" I hiss, amid shushing Emma.

He gives in and begins his descent of the makeshift wooden watchtower.

As he reaches the ground, everything falls strangely silent. From beyond the cellar, I hear the sound of soft whistling.

Carnage.

Immediately following a deafening crash is a slow drift of soil from the ceiling. Immediately following the cloud of soil is a thunderous roar as Erwin and I make a similar noise to Emma, expelling the air from our lungs in the form of a screech.

Emma, however, falls quiet as I am buried under several feet of wood, soil and shattered concrete. I lose sight of the brief light exposed by the collapse as my eyes are obscured. My mouth is filled with debris, it becomes exceedingly difficult to breathe.

I succumb to the weight of the fractured foundation, losing thoughts of my silent siblings to the overwhelming urge to sleep.

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Maggie

I dart away as the chimney I was perched upon threatens to crumble. A bomb has been dropped on the house that it is attached to, it frightens me immensely, yet, it is not the first blast I have fallen witness to. As I become a black and white bullet into the darkening sky, I spot something peculiar. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a tiny hand emerged from the rubble. I land beside it and peck at its palm. Its sudden movement forces me backwards in shock, then, I shoot upwards in search of a new, uninterrupted place to rest.

As I pass above the saturnine battlefield that once was my city of Berlin, I dive into a small, cobbled alleyway. I perch beside a seemingly lifeless girl. However, in her hair are two brilliant red ribbons. I clasp one in my beak and tug at it. It falls away easily, unravelling into a longer version of itself. I keep hold of it as I depart, it has a wonderful shine.

I continue to venture through smoke- polluted skies with my newfound trinket. However, I am stopped by a glint of silver in the corner of the war ruined cathedral. I descend upon a second corpse of a slightly older boy. In his hand, he holds an ornately crafted pen loosely. I risk my safety amongst so many soldiers in active combat, but this instrument cannot be wasted on a corpse. I snatch it from his somewhat loose grip, nestling it beside the red ribbon in my beak.

Before I leave this place of bloody bedlam for a final time. I lock eyes on a soldier. He stares so keenly at me, as if he has never seen a bird before myself. I bob my head. He cautiously stretches his lips into a sort of smile. A silver tear leaves his left eye and travels down his face. He doesn't break his intent gaze until he is rudely barged by a fellow soldier, somehow urging him to begin to run towards the fight once more.

My wings carry me towards the risen moon, the sounds of war becoming more distant now. I hold my precious things in the bend of my beak and forget the death. I forget the broken buildings and the disbanded families.

But, behind my eyes is the image of that soldier. With his gun limply hung, his hands bloody, his face smeared with earth. He looked just like all the others and yet, I remember him. I remember the way he looked upon me with such hope.