

REWRITTEN ENDING

the book thief

featuring:

flying memories — the best and the worst — the planes — the

bombing of heaven — the accordion — the mayor

and his wife — a proper burial

FLYING MEMORIES

I watched *The Book Thief* grow as Liesel continued filling in the empty spaces with her words. Each word, each letter even, was just as important as the one before and the one to come after.

Every so often, she would smile or frown as she saw the process of her own maturing. She felt like her book was a puzzle; every word added another piece. As Liesel wrote, she felt her memories being engraved into the book, becoming forever remembered.

Her hand was aching by page three. Her fingers were stiff by page four, and were trembling by page five. Her shaky words stuttered from her mind to the ever-filling sheets of paper, but determination nudged her on, forcing her to write yet another letter, another word, another page.

Fatigue seized Liesel sometime between her tenth and eleventh page, and her writing hand slowly stilled. As if her will to stay awake was a dam, torrents of dreams came flooding through the river of her subconsciousness.

* * * **WHAT SHE DREAMED OF** * * *
A world without Nazis.

The skies were, for once, a clear azure; the air was clean of smoke. Concentration camps didn't even exist seeing as they weren't needed. Jews, people who weren't Jews, and

everyone inside and outside the range stood side by side, trying to improve their nation, and ultimately, their world. This was a place where Max didn't have to hide for being what he was, and where Liesel didn't have to keep secrets of harboring a Jew. Where her family wasn't murdered for their belief in communism and they still lived.

The book thief was enraptured by her dream, and she never wanted to leave it. Even when the sirens sounded, she fought her consciousness, hoping to linger just a bit longer. Werner begged her to go and stay safe in her dream. When Hans shook her, she had no choice but to surrender to awakesness.

“Liesel, come.”

Werner disappeared.

Grabbing her precious books, she ran with Papa to the bomb shelter.

The houses of Himmel Street were creaking from fear as the bombs fell atrociously overhead. The women clutched their babies and prayed that everything would be alright, while the men stood passively and carefully concealed their emotions but cowered on the inside. Children covered their ears and hoped that the beating of their hearts in their ears would drown out the beating of the bombs.

In the midst of violence and panic, joyful notes sounded, and words from a story were quietly read. The apprehensive atmosphere noticeably loosened.

No one had to look, but sitting on little wooden chairs in the center of the room were Liesel and Papa, scaring away fear itself.

The shower of bombs slackened to a quieter drizzle, until they disappeared altogether, ending with a bomb that even the bravest would have flinched at.

Minutes later, the all-clear siren sounded.

The people hiding in 45 Himmel Street peeked outside.

*** * * WHAT THEY NOTICED * * ***

- 1. A thin layer of snow-like ash.**
- 2. Scattered shrapnel.**
- 3. Remnants of houses.**
- 4. Burning rubble.**
- 5. Screaming.**

Himmel Street was safe, but many of its residents immediately started sprinting. Ignoring their own houses, they ran to the next neighborhood, and their searching voices called out names.

“Anton! Anton! Where are you?!”

“Lara! Are you safe?”

“Have you seen Heidi? Has anyone seen Heidi?”

People had just begun to crawl out of their basements to the safety of the street. I waited for the right moment, and then climbed in to collect a couple of unlucky souls who emerged from their shelters too early. Those people had believed that they were safe, and that “the bombs would never hit them.” So much for that.

Liesel and Papa stood and watched the flames devour the buildings as the LSE pulled out survivor after survivor. Rudy quietly joined them. In the end, everyone stood and surveyed the scene in vigil silence, as the flames consumed what was left of the fragile buildings. Soon enough, only charred remains of memories crumbled to ash and were blown away by the wind.

The memories flew away.

When the people of Himmel Street began to walk back to their homes, Rudy and Liesel pulled away from the rest of the crowd.

“That was really close.”

“Too close.”

“A kiss to celebrate?”

“Shut up, *Saukerl*.”

“Someday, *Saumensch*.”

She laughed. He grinned.

Afterwards, Liesel would write about this incident. About Rudy. About the flying memories. About how, if Papa hadn’t woken her, and the planes overhead had just changed their target a little bit, she wouldn’t be alive.

Then she would regret it.

THE BEST AND THE WORST

She finished writing.

After days and days of persistence, writing at least ten pages per day, Liesel finished writing *The Book Thief*. She edited and revised the pages with meticulous correctness, weeding out spelling and grammatical mistakes. Her hands were stronger than they were before she wrote the book, and she bore rough blisters where her pencil would've rested.

Her book was divided into ten sections; each section was named after books that changed her life.

Although I've watched Liesel grow up, and I saw what she saw, I still enjoyed reading with her, pointing out a small error now and then, commenting on my favorite parts. I don't think she even heard me because she was absorbed in her own words, but I swear that she had turned and looked me in the eye at one point. I had frozen.

Not many things can scare me; I am Death, afterall. When the book thief gazed at me so calmly, I was terrified.

That night, proud of her newly finished book, but exhausted from effort, she went to find Rudy. Only a victory of stealing could kick her adrenaline back into action.

When she looked back, she realized that the day *The Book Thief* was finished was the

best and worst day of her life.

I hadn't wanted to, but I had to commit and carry out my duty, as Nazis and citizens carried out theirs.

That evening, Liesel snuck out of her house with her finished book in hand, unknowingly for the last time.

THE PLANES

They knew the fruit fields and orchards were barren. None of the crops were particularly successful, and those that produced even the littlest amounts of food had to provide their produce to the army. Stealing from a passerby would be immoral. The mayor's house was inconsiderable, as Ilsa Hermann's understanding and kindness warded away any thoughts in Liesel's mind of robbing them.

There was no place left to steal.

Silence.

They sat side by side at Amper River, both waiting for the other to speak, but only the water spoke its quiet, flowing language.

Besides, there was not much to say.

A while later, they heard a barely audible droning overhead.

"Shh, Liesel, listen. Please. Do you hear that?"

Looking up, she searched the skies. Nothing.

The buzzing continued.

*** * * FACTS ABOUT THE BUZZING * * ***

They were planes hidden from view by the forest, and

they were headed towards Himmel Street.

The book thief focused on pinpointing the sound down, but it was all around her. It was almost as if invisible hornets were circling her, waiting to sting. No matter how hard she squinted or concentrated, she couldn't find the source.

Fear began to stalk them, but curiosity and lack of motivation to move made them stay.

One of everyone's greatest fears is the fear of the unknown.

One of everyone's fatal flaws is lazy curiosity.

But it just so happens that this fatal flaw is what saved them.

Liesel didn't want to go home; she didn't want to sleep either.

By now, the pair were lying on the smooth stones worn down by the river, watching the sun as it made its final descent of the day. They weren't touching, and they still weren't talking. *The Book Thief* was snugly resting on Liesel's stomach, being cradled as she breathed.

Two innocent children.

Just lying there.

Quietly.

The droning intensified.

Fast forward a few hours. The sun had been diminished by the pressing twilight. The bodies of Rudy and Liesel were beginning to surrender to sleep, even though the buzzing became insistently overwhelming.

It happened again.

She still had one eye open.

One eye in dream.

The planes flew past, awakening Liesel. A certain curiosity led her to track the planes' progresses across the blistered sky with her eyes, watching the planes' smoke trails form then dissipate.

Then she witnessed and survived the bombing of Himmel Street.

THE BOMBING OF HEAVEN

People typically describe shocking experiences occurring “as if time slowed down” and that their hearts “pounded like a stallion’s after a race.” For the book thief, it was the exact opposite.

Everything went by too quickly.

There was no siren.

The planes placed themselves over the street, took aim, and dropped the bombs.

There was a flash.

A bang.

Then there was a deathly silence.

THE ACCORDION

She sprinted. It wasn't an instinct, nor was it something she necessarily had to do. She just sprinted.

And she left *The Book Thief* behind.

He sprinted after her.

After collecting the poor victims' souls, I went over to the Amper myself and sat for awhile, enjoying the lapping of water around my feet.

Yes, Death has feet.

I noticed the book blatantly sitting there, waiting to be picked up. So I plucked it off the ground and took it with me for safekeeping.

I've read it many times since.

"Papa? Mama? Where are you?"

She searched.

She searched through the mounds of rubble that were once houses of friends, roads of recollection, and building blocks of her life.

He searched too.

Himmel Street was barely recognizable. The already impossibly run-down houses had finally met their match, and every building collapsed into piles of building supplies and furniture. The fires had already started, but they were a minor issue; the more pressing

matter was if there were any survivors.

* * * **HERE'S A FACT OR TWO** * * *

There were no survivors.

There was only me.

Human hope is a strange thing. Even when all seems to be lost, humans still hold on to what they have, and what they always have is hope. It's that one strand of insanity that everyone tugs on when their situation seems bleak. They just hope and keep hoping.

The LSE pulled out body after body away from the mess and smoke, never stopping to see if their hearts were still beating or if their lungs were still breathing. No, they just continued running through the broken buildings, pulling out more lifeless bodies.

And Liesel continued searching for her parents, hoping (there's that word again) that they were alive.

She found them, sprawled out on the remnants of the street like all of the other corpses. Her papa was peacefully sleeping. Her mama had lost her cardboard expression.

She checked for their pulses, sat back, stared, and started shaking.

Somewhere near her, there was a choked cry.

She didn't have to look who it was; she already knew. However, she calmly lifted her head and looked up to see the other survivor, kneeling by his lost family.

Rudy.

He looked up as well, little streams of tears cleaning his grimy face. Their eyes met for a second, then they both looked away. They went back to staring at their deceased family instead.

Liesel lost it.

"Papa? Come on! Wake up, Papa! Papa! Mama? You too! Wake up! It's just a dream! You're just sleeping! You have to wake up now!"

She cried.

He cried.

Even I cried.

She she headed towards what remained of her house. Rudy, noticing the sudden movement, ran over and restrained her before she made any rash actions.

“Please, let me go. I have to get something.”

“No.”

“The accordion.”

“No. Tell the LSE.”

With that, he pulled her along to one of the workers.

“Please. My papa’s accordion. It’s inside.”

The worker went in and retrieved it.

She held onto it tightly.

Rudy picked up a piece of shrapnel.

They left, hand in hand.

They were homeless. They lost their families.

But they had each other.

The LSE worker continued pulling out more bodies and putting out more fires. It wasn’t until much later when he thought of the little girl who asked for him to fetch an accordion. He thought it a strange request, but he knew people sometimes had queer needs after a bombing, so he had gotten it without question. He never knew why the little girl had asked for the accordion out of all of her family’s possessions, until he met me. I smiled a sad smile, and had told him, “For her papa, to keep on playing.”

THE MAYOR AND HIS WIFE

There was talk in Molching, Germany. Two neighborhoods, located right next to each other, have been bombed. Many of Molching's citizens went to sleep thinking that they would be next.

The book thief and her accomplice wandered. They had nowhere to go, and nowhere to be. So they wandered.

People were looking for the two children who had escaped the bombing of Himmel Street. They found the children on the bridge overlooking the Amper River. The children were taken to the police station so a decision of what to do with them could be made.

The mayor and his wife were there.

Liesel and Rudy left with them.

A PROPER BURIAL

Liesel had promised that she would give her papa a proper burial.
So she did.

The day of the funeral for the Hubermanns and Steiners, Liesel stood in a black dress. Rudy wore a dark suit and tie. They still held hands.
There weren't many mourners.
I felt guilty.

*** * * THE REASON TO MY GUILT * * ***
I stole Hans from Liesel.

The book thief despised me for this. I had surrounded her life and demolished it.

Another ceremony was held for the Steiners when Alex Steiner came home.
Suddenly, there were four less mouths to feed.
But there was still Rudy. And there was Liesel.

I'm in most places at least once, and in 1943, I was just about everywhere.

EPILOGUE

the last color

featuring:

max — may 8, 1955 — a

boy and a girl — his last words — the

official meeting — a final note

MAX

The war finally ended. The Germans lost.

Concentration camps were liberated, and celebrations were thrown. When Liesel tried looking for Max with Rudy and Mr. Steiner in Dachau, they were denied by the Americans. Dejectedly, they went back to what they now called “home.”

A few days later, Alex Steiner opened up his tailor shop again. There was a limited amount of money to use, but that was bearable because they had each other.

Liesel would always sit at the window, staring out, hoping that she would see feathers of hair.

A week had gone by, and no one arrived. Liesel did not lose hope, but she knew that staring out the window for hours on end wouldn't make that feather-like hair appear. She began to aid the Steiners around the shop.

Mr. Steiner often asked Liesel to find a certain cloth or pattern design from the mannequins. Once, when she was carrying out such a task, Mr. Steiner tapped on Liesel's shoulder and told her that there was a man waiting for her. Slowly, she stepped out of the maze of mannequins, and looked at the man.

No, not just “the man.”

Max.

With tears lining her eyes, she ran over to him for a tight embrace.

“Max.”

“Liesel.”

“I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too.”

The tears fell.

They clung to each other for ages, never wanting to let go, but all good things must come to an end. When they let go, Liesel introduced Max and the Steiners to each other.

The men shook hands.

Liesel’s tears continued to flow.

One more mouth to feed.

A little bit more of love.

MAY 8, 1955

It's been a decade since Hitler threw his soul at me, and the second World War came to an end.

It is also the day that the book thief became married to the boy, now a man, with lemon-yellow hair.

Max had walked Liesel up the aisle.

In one of the guests' seats, there was a *watschen* spoon.

In another, there was an accordion.

I had been present myself.

Sometimes, the finest moments are caused by the worst tragedies.

A BOY AND A GIRL

There was pain. A lot of it.
Then there was a high-pitched crying.
And another mouth to feed.

*** * * THE RESULT OF LOVE * * ***

**It was a girl.
Her name was Barbara.**

They had one more child after Barbara. His name was Hans.

HIS LAST WORDS

At the right moment, I reached in and pulled his soul away.

It wasn't exactly the nicest way to pass away.

Remember that piece of shrapnel that Rudy took from the bombing of Himmel Street? He had kept it since that day. While he was examining it one day, he accidentally nicked his skin with it. Thinking it was just another cut, he ran it under water and put a bandage over it.

It became infected.

Gradually, his immune system weakened. Liesel sat by him every day. In his last moments, he had said something that only I heard.

*** * * HIS LAST WORDS * * ***

“I love you, Liesel. Goodbye...”

In an indirect way, Rudy had also died from the bombing of Himmel Street.

He had died without the book thief's kiss.

THE OFFICIAL MEETING

The book thief had an amazing life. We both agreed on that. Now, she even respects me and what I do. There is no more hatred towards me. Just an understanding.

Max's time had come fourteen years ago. Rudy had fallen into my arms less than a year ago. Of course, she had mourned.

But she understood.

Now, it's her time.

She had acknowledged the forthcoming events, and had already said her goodbyes to her children, grandchildren, and her only great-grandchild at that time. Then I gently grasped her soul away from her tired body.

She had gone while she was sleeping.

One moment her heart was pumping its already sluggish beat, and the next, it slowed to a stop.

* * * **HER FINAL THOUGHTS** * * *

1. A boy with lemon hair.

2. An accordion.

3. A *watschen* spoon.

4. Feathery hair.

5. *Kommunist*.

6. Thieving.

When I had taken her soul away, she greeted me expectantly, as if we were friends from long ago. I had shown her *The Book Thief*, now barely recognizable from seventy years of wear and tear. But it was still the same book.

Overwhelmed, she had looked at me and asked, “You found it? Have you read it?”

“Yes, I have. It was down at the Amper, and I just came across it. Yes, I have read it. It was...” I stammered. I did not have the words for her book. I was just forming the words when she spoke.

“Did you understand it?”

Yet again, I had lost my words.

Instead, I gave *The Book Thief* back to its author, to its creator.

We walked. I don’t exactly remember where, but for some reason, I thought it was Himmel Street. The one before it was bombed.

We didn’t speak of the previous conversation.

Luckily, she had many questions in need of answering from me. But what could I say that she did not already know? Her eyes, heart, and mind have seen, felt, and thought more than I ever have in my long career. Her wisdom was greater than any other being, no matter if that being was an old oak tree or God himself.

That is why I asked my next question.

“Did you ever see me?”

“In a way, yes, I have,” she replied. “I have seen you touch my life, as you have to many others. I had felt you overcoming Werner. I had glimpsed as you dropped from a plane towards Himmel Street. And I see you now. I have learned, in my short life, that you are inevitable. That you are always in plain sight. People just have to look a little harder to notice you.”

I lost my words yet again.

After a while, when I recovered from the escapement of my words, I told her Rudy's last words.

She already knew. She hadn't heard, but she already knew.

The book thief already knew.

A FINAL NOTE

Liesel's soul eventually walked away. I was alone in the middle of nowhere.

I remember that after my walk, I had sat down on a rock and thought. I thought about the book thief, I thought about her life, I thought about everything. Most of all, I thought about humans.

Humans, I have decided, are haunting creatures.

I have never forgotten Liesel. She lurks among the other souls, but she always stands out with those colors.

First the colors.

Then the humans.

That's usually how I see things.

Or at least, how I try.