

## Liesel's Letter

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Liesel resides in Canberra, Australia. She has left her life in Germany far behind her, but she will never forget the pain and suffering she had endured. Her wrinkled hands tell the story of her struggles, her mature skin wrinkled, the ruins of an old German map. She is rummaging through a suitcase when she sees a bundle of stolen books dating back to her days of thievery, accompanied by a folded piece of paper. Liesel unfolds it and opens up the letter she had written to her mother long ago. She is reminded of her mother, who was a communist. *The Book Thief* skims over the words, replaying the events of that day in her head.

Bombs littered the sky as Liesel struggled through the wreckage. The smoke clawed at her throat as it formed a thick blanket of smog around her. Young Liesel stumbled to her knees, coughing on the stench of defeat. It was ubiquitous. Flakes of ash rained down from the sky, covering her like a trench coat.

'Liesel, is that you?'

A cough spluttered from behind her. Here is where you can establish context and then her mind returns to the past. Liesel turned to face the raspy voice. Ilsa. She fought back the pain aching in her limbs and ran towards her. Ilsa enveloped her in a hug. Liesel didn't let go.

'I found something amongst the wreckage when I checked if you were there,' Ilsa whispered. She passed the letter to the little girl and looked in her eyes. The letter was familiar to Liesel. It was one of many she'd written to her mother and requested Hans to post, but now knew, upon this discovery, that he never did.

Unwillingly, Liesel read. A grey film sunk over her eyes. She concentrated on the type-written letters. They were cold, and hard. She ran her fingers down the crumpled edges. A tear fell clumsily down her cheek and licked the paper. Then another, and another, until the letter bled ink. *I love you mother, and I think of you a lot.* The last words her mother never heard. Liesel stared, motionless at Ilsa's face.

Her voice quivered. 'Is my mother dead?' she whispered.

Ilsa's face was grave. She didn't have to speak, for the Book Thief already knew the answer. She sobbed, like a baby yearning for their mother. Liesel clung to the mayor's wife, her fingers clasped tightly around the letter. Their bodies pressed to each other, a bomb struck nearby, and a rumble coursed through them. The frail woman staggered and Liesel was forced to her hands and knees, cupping her ears. Her head smacked against the ground. A

small pool of blood trickled down the side of her forehead. The roar of the bombs thundering down onto the German soil was deafening. Liesel was hit by an immense rush of heat. The warm air scalded her cheeks and stung her wounds. Sweat clung to her loose strands of hair. Gasping and choking on the fumes, she tried to stand.

‘Ilsa,’ she called out. ‘Ilsa.’ She looked left and right, but could not make out another figure in the clouds of ash suspended in the air. She peered through the murk and coughed as the particles swept into her lungs and up her nostrils. *It’s okay Liesel, your mother is here.* She took a deep breath in and cried ‘Ilsa, where are you?’

‘Here, child,’ Ilsa groaned as she clutched her leg. Liesel stumbled over, trying desperately to get the woman to her knees. She didn’t budge. Her leg was visibly broken. It had started to swell, a rainbow of bruises developing around her knee cap.

A car pulled up shortly after. The mayor rolled down the window. ‘Ilsa, we must leave now,’ he yelled.

Noticing his injured wife, he clambered out of his car and with great difficulty sat her down in the passenger seat. Obscured from the mayor’s view, Liesel ran to the car. Once she was inside, she didn’t dare look out of the window. She wanted to remember Molching as it was before the bombs, before the obliteration of her home, before the death and destruction. The dark sky, the now distorted houses, the corpses heaped in piles, she wanted to forget. That wasn’t her Molching. Liesel tried to block it out. She failed. As she took one last look out of her window she could see the town of Molching smouldering. The city was alive with flames. Orange fire engulfed the remaining buildings. Her school that once stood tall and proud was crashing down like a stack of dominos.

Ilsa did not speak.

The mayor looked at Liesel. ‘Are you alright?’ he asked quietly.

In juxtaposition to Ilsa and Liesel, the mayor looked clean and presentable in a shiny Nazi suit. Liesel stared at the Swastika branded on the sleeve of his left shoulder. *I hate the Fuhrer.* She was angry. She was so angry. Her blood boiled inside her, simmering like a saucepan, threatening to bubble over. She forced it down. Now was not the time.

Liesel did not know how to respond. She tried to speak but she was robbed of her words. Instead she nodded, her alabaster face barely visible under the layers of ash. Tears dried on her cheeks. Blood caked the side of her head. She was still clutching the letter. In a weak attempt to preserve it, she folded it with her shaking fingers and tucked it into her pocket. She wouldn’t read it again for many years to come. For the rest of her childhood, as

she lived with Ilsa and the Mayor, Liesel tried to forget about her mother. It was only now, at her ripe old age, that she was suddenly reminded.

Liesel finishes reading the letter and holds it to her chest. Oh, how she misses her mother. She shudders, running her hands over the scar on the side of her head. Despite her age, the scar had not healed; it was a sign of her bravery and her mother's sacrifice. The letter sits on her leg. She is thankful that she has something to remember her by, no matter how much pain it causes. All those nights spent in the basement learning how to read and write were worth it. Without the power of words *The Book Thief* wields, she would have no connection to her mother. What the Nazis's deemed as irrelevant, Liesel treasured like gold. These books and letters she possesses are her life, with her own secrets and thoughts intertwined between the pages. She cannot forgive nor forget Hitler, or the war, or the loss of her family. Sighing, Liesel puts the letter away. She cannot fathom to think of her mother anymore, as it only brings pain. She leans back on her bed and closes her eyes, remembering the day she left Molching and the last time she saw her mother. She much prefers the version in her dreams.