

**Adventures With Rudy**  
**With characters from *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak**  
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I snap my book closed to go fetch the door. Ma's in a particularly good mood today, so she lets me open it. "You never know who's on the other side," she used to tell me.

When I swing the squeaky brown door open, my best friend, Rudy, is on the other side.

"Liesel," He breathes, folded over in exhaustion. "I ran all the way here. You'll never believe what I just found!"

A burst of excitement rushes through me; I've been inside all day, reading *Fauch the Dog* for the thirteenth time.

"Ma," I call into the kitchen, where something awful tasting is most likely cooking. "I'm going with Rudy!"

She replies with a grunt, which is her form of yes, and we're off!

Rudy and I dash past run-down houses, through games of street soccer, and in the town, where Jewish shops are destroyed and in ashes.

"I still don't know where we're going," I shout at Rudy, knowing he won't tell me anyway.

"You'll see," he responds a few feet in front of me. Called it.

We eventually enter the outer parts of Munich, where small orchards lie in sleepy forests.

Rudy slows to a walk, and our shoes squelch on the mud from last night's rainfall. He leads us to a bubbling creek and stops.

"Whoa," I gasp, "Papa would love it here." The creek looks about a foot deep, and the water is so clear I can see the tiny pebbles resting at the bottom. Papa would especially love how quiet it is and the variety of colors.

"No, silly, this isn't what I brought you here for. I'm just preparing to jump across the creek," Rudy explains.

Then his fingers start to wiggle at his sides, he bends in a runners position, and takes three long strides... *thud!* Rudy lands on the other side of the creek, splashing mud everywhere.

"Rudy," I groan, "there's no way I'll be able to jump across that!"

However, he insists that I can and gives me a few tips on how to jump over it.

"Now go!" he commands, fiery excitement burning in his eyes.

My legs are about half his size, so I take 6 short steps and fly off the ground. Exhilaration rushes through me and I can feel the wind against my face and- the moment's already over. I land, certainly not as gracefully as my best friend (if his is what you call graceful), but I get the job done.

"Nice," Rudy compliments, and keeps walking.

"Maybe we should run," I suggest, pointing to the orange sky, displaying a magnificent sunset. I've seen brighter, more clear ones- before the bombing started, of course.

"We're here!" Rudy sings abruptly, showing off... trees?

"This is it?"

"Yep!"

I'm looking at dead trees in the middle of a dead forest, waiting for my brain to realize what's so special about this place. Nothing comes.

"Ugh, fine," Rudy complains. "Since you can't figure it out... the P.C.T! Perfect Climbing Tree!"

He then runs toward one of the trees and latches on to a branch about 2 feet taller than him. Rudy swings himself over the branch and is now perched on top of it, as if sitting in a chair.

"Your turn," he says as he hops off of the tree to give me a chance.

I run a long way and prepare to hook on to the branch but jump way too low. I miss it by about a foot and expect to get a faceful of mud, but instead I'm greeted by the collision of human bones.

"Good thing I knew you weren't gonna make it," Rudy says, still holding my sagging body. Somehow he managed to catch me mid-air as I was falling.

"Th- thanks," I stutter, stunned. I look down and find the bottom of my pants covered in brown mud. Groaning, I exclaim,

"Ma's gonna kill me!"

"Hey, if I didn't catch you, your whole body would be muddy!" Rudy adds, still proud of his superhero save. He rocks back and forth on his toes sheepishly and I already know what he's thinking.

"No, Rudy, no," I insist. Yet he offers anyway.

"So... how about a kiss?"