

Post-War

By: Mya Bryant

Originally: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak

Many years had passed since her little town had been bombed. Liesel was an adult, in Australia, surrounded by people who were blissfully unaware of the horrors she had seen and experienced. She had a house, too. It was small in Australian terms; one story, one bedroom with a closet-sized bathroom next door. But to Liesel, it was far too big and empty. For the first few months after she arrived in Sydney, she woke up thinking it had all been a nightmare. That if she were to go downstairs she would hear Ma and Papa bickering over his “silly” accordion. That Ma would be bent over a pot containing whatever awful-tasting stew they were to have for dinner. That Rudy would be at the door, peering in through the dirty window. Oh, Rudy. How she wished she still had Rudy. But every day Liesel woke up in a far too comfortable bed, to an unusually bright sun, surrounded by too-sweet, too-clear air.

It had been hard to move on. At first, Liesel had not wanted to. She could not bear to see a loved one die again. But after many lonely, sleepless nights, she knew she needed company. Liesel and Max had a small, happy ceremony and an even happier life together. When they reunited that day in the tailor's shop, they vowed never to leave each other again. They spent the rest of their lives together. Max always chased away Liesel's frequent uncomfortable thoughts. He was the only person who she could talk to, who she could confide in. What they had was not true love, and they both knew it. It was rather a mutual connection over shared traumatic experiences. They were best friends before they were husband and wife. When Max died, it was all Liesel could do to not fall back into that eternal sinking feeling that dragged her down for all those years.

Alex Steiner kept in touch until he died of a heart attack at a surprisingly old age. He had continued to live in Molching, working in the tailor's shop and later writing about his experiences at war. He would always be grateful for Liesel keeping his son out of (some) trouble while he was at war. Liesel considered him to be her grandfather, as she never knew her own grandfather.

Some days Liesel swore she saw Death lurking in the corners of allies, shrouded in shadows. She felt that its gaze was merely curious, not cruel or malicious. She didn't know whether or not to be comforted by it. Death had taken so much from her already. Why hadn't it stolen her away, too?

Liesel cherished the little book she kept on a stand in the small sitting area. She cherished the accordion proudly displayed right next to it. She loved the photo of Heinz and Ilsa Hermann; the mayor and his wife who adopted her after the bombing, who had both passed within a week of each other, right before Liesel and Max moved to

Australia. She adored the photo of her and Max on their wedding day in an elegant, oak wood frame. But most of all, Liesel revered her memories of Rudy. She felt regretful and pitiful and sad whenever she thought of him. But most of all, she felt grateful for him. He was the only one to befriend her; the only one to play with her. He was the boy who jumped into the freezing lake to save her book. It was Rudy who was her first love. Liesel would never forget the lemon-haired boy, her *Saukerl*.

Liesel Meminger-Hubermann-Hermann-Vandenburg died at a very old age. When she finally did meet Death, they reunited like old friends. It took her on a final walk through Sydney where they talked about the war, the bombing, her life. Death had told her: "I am haunted by humans."

Liesel had three children and many grandchildren. She had a loving husband. She finally had a life away from war. After many long years, Liesel reunited with the spirits of Hans and Rosa Hubermann, her brother who died all those years ago, Ilsa and Heinz Hermann, Alex Steiner, Max, and most importantly, she reunited with the boy whose hair would remain the color of lemons forever.