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RESIST

TOM PALMER

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For Ailsa Bathgate,
with huge gratitude

VELP, 1943

ONE

Velp, the Netherlands, 1943 – under occupation

Edda didn't have time to change direction before the level-crossing barrier came down. The barrier blocked the road that ran over the railway track to the side of the station. With a train about to leave, she was forced to stop along with a dozen other cyclists.

A pair of German soldiers manning the checkpoint ran their eyes over Edda and the others. Edda didn't dare to look at them. If they saw the fear on her face, they would be suspicious – they might guess what she was doing.

But Edda knew she could not just turn and cycle away. That would also draw their attention. She had to wait and behave as if she was just an ordinary teenager cycling home from school.

It was fortunate for Edda that there were other cyclists being held up at the barrier. It helped her to blend in. The Germans had been occupying the Netherlands for over three years now, and because they had taken almost all the country's petrol, most people travelled by bicycle. But as the Germans had also taken most of the rubber needed for inner tubes, those cyclists had to stuff their tyres with straw, while others had even made wooden wheels for their bikes.

The Nazis took everything, Edda thought. You couldn't do anything or go anywhere without being reminded that they were here.

But the state of her bicycle tyres was the least of Edda's problems.

The real worry was what she was carrying. A sheaf of illegal resistance newsletters that she was to deliver to addresses south of the railway line. Sheets printed with details about the latest anti-German resistance activity – attacks on Nazi soldiers or troop trains, for example – as the Dutch people tried to fight back against their occupiers.

If the Nazi guards at the checkpoint found the newsletters, they'd torture Edda to find out where she had got them from, then they'd kill her. No doubt about that.

Edda could feel sweat on her forehead even though it was a cool evening. Eyes still fixed ahead, she tried to look calm as she remembered the words of the man who had handed her the newsletters to deliver.

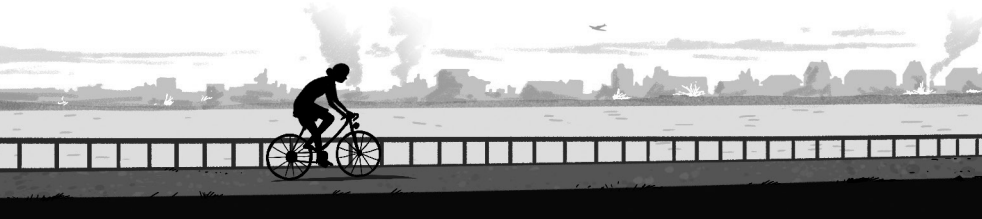
"Avoid the Nazis if you can," he'd said. "If you think they're going to stop you, throw the

newsletters away. If that's not possible, act like an innocent child so they don't search you."

Edda had no chance of throwing anything away now she was just a few metres from the German soldiers, and her heart raced ever faster as she saw that one of them had started to check each cyclist's ID card.

All people living in the Netherlands aged fourteen and over had to carry an ID card bearing their photograph, fingerprints and other personal details. Edda now fished hers out of her bag, her mind a frenzy of panicked questions. What if they searched her? What if they found the newsletters?

She glanced at the card in her hand, feeling the usual jolt at seeing the name there – Edda. Not her real name, which was Audrey. But when she had returned to the Netherlands from school in England nearly four years earlier, her mother had banned



her from using Audrey. It was an English name and identified her as British, like her father. That alone would make the Germans suspicious of her and perhaps more curious about what she was carrying.

As she waited for her turn, Edda closed her eyes and tried to remember why on earth she had agreed to take on this dangerous task. The fear she felt now was too much to bear. But she knew she only had herself to blame.

Edda had heard about the work of the Dutch resistance and wanted to get involved – to do more than just wash bandages and serve food to patients in the hospital where she volunteered after school. And she knew that the doctor there, Dr Hendrik Visser 't Hooft, was an important figure in the resistance.

When she'd approached him, Dr Visser 't Hooft was unsure about her offer of help. Edda was just

a young girl. “Do you really want to get involved in such dangerous work?” he asked.

But Edda was determined, so Dr Visser 't Hooft gave her a test. He asked her to memorise five addresses, which she did easily. So then he challenged her to remember ten.

Again, this was easy for Edda.

“You have a fine memory,” he commented.

“It’s from ballet,” Edda told him. “We have to remember dozens of positions and moves. We have to have good memories.”

The doctor smiled. “Then I have the perfect job for you,” he said. “I would like you to deliver resistance newsletters to multiple addresses if you can?”

Edda scowled now at that memory, still waiting for the train to leave and the barrier to rise. She had been so naive to imagine she could do this. More than naive. She had been stupid.

Boasting about how she had a good memory because of her dance classes.

Seriously?

A soldier stopped in front of her. His gloved hand on her handlebars made Edda want to push him away.

"ID?" he demanded.

Edda handed the card to him and he checked it, squinting at the photograph. Then he glanced at her bag.

"Bag. Open."

Edda felt like she might be sick, but she had no choice other than to lift her satchel off her shoulder. She handed it to the soldier and looked down the platform, trying to distract herself from the fear that made her feel like she might collapse.

She could see more German soldiers forcing people onto a train. The people looked familiar. They

were local. She recognised some. They had suitcases. The children seemed to be crying. Edda realised that some of the adults were crying too. But she was too scared for herself at that moment to think clearly about what was happening on the platform.

"What is this?" the soldier asked, lifting some sheets of paper out of her bag.

Edda turned back to face the soldier and looked him in the eye, trying to pretend she had nothing to hide.

"School work." She could hear her voice wavering.

After a few moments, the soldier handed the sheets back, then moved on to the next person.

Edda took in a fast deep breath, then slowly exhaled, relieved that she had decided not to carry the illegal newsletters in her bag.

Trembling, she looked again at the train, seeing

the distressed faces of the passengers staring back at her.

Where were these people being taken? She had heard the rumours. Some were transported to Germany as slave labour – mainly young Dutch men over the age of eighteen. But others were taken to huge camps where many of them were murdered. Could it be true?

Edda shuddered. She hated the Nazis – hated what they had done to the Netherlands and to people that she loved. To her family.

Her older brother, Alex, had been forced into hiding. And she could hardly bear to think about what had happened to her uncle Otto ...

No, this wasn't the time to think about these things. She had to stay sharp. She had to make a choice. Now. And it was a difficult one.

When the barrier lifted, would she give up

this madness of delivering newsletters and just go home where she would be safe? Or could she find the courage to carry on and deliver them, even if it meant putting herself through more of this almost unbearable fear?