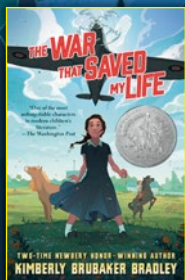


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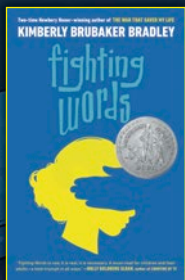
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DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

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An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by Dial Books for Young Readers,
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 9780735228566
Premium ISBN: 9798217112203

\$PrintCode
LSCH

Design by Jennifer Kelly
Text set in Hertz Pro

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*To Harold Grinspoon, who understands how
much children need stories and books of their own.
Sir, you sent me to Israel: This is the book I found there.*

CHAPTER ONE

JULY 10, 1942—PARIS, FRANCE

I could hear sirens. Sirens meant trouble.

“Nothing to worry about, Miri,” Mama said, in her usual soft Yiddish. She didn’t look up from mending the pocket of my other dress.

“You don’t know that,” I said.

Her eyes flicked toward me. “It’s a fire engine, not a police sedan.”

“You can tell the difference?”

“I can.”

I knew she meant to reassure me, but I didn’t quite believe her. To me the two sounded the same. Ever since Monsieur Rosenbaum had been taken away, nearly two years ago now, the sound of sirens made my stomach hurt and my vision swim. Mama thought she understood. I let her think she did.

Now I took a deep breath. Released it slowly. Far below, the sirens continued. “I’m going up,” I said.

My mother pressed her lips together. Papa insisted she let me climb onto the roof, but she hated it when I did. Our apartment was on the sixth floor of our building, so if I did fall I would

splatter, but I never feared falling. The roof was the only place in Paris I felt safe. Nothing could touch me there.

I moved our red geranium in its clay pot away from the window. I stretched one foot onto the top of the metal grille that kept things from falling out our window, grabbed the window frame, and heaved myself up so I was standing on the grille. From there it was easy to scramble up the slate tiles, still cool in the morning sun. Our window was a dormer on the top floor: It had its own little roof like a hat. I straddled the hat with my legs and let my head and shoulders rest against the main roof. I turned my face to the blue summer sky.

Sirens still wailed, but I could breathe easier now.

It had been my fault the Nazis took Monsieur Rosenbaum away. No one else knew that. I didn't have the courage to confess it, not even to my mother.

It happened not long after the Germans invaded Paris, in the summer of 1940 when I was ten. I'd been walking through the crowded streets of our neighborhood, the Pletzl, on my way home from school when I saw our neighbor Monsieur Rosenbaum standing in front of two German soldiers on the sidewalk just ahead of me. Monsieur Rosenbaum was talking to them, though I couldn't hear his words. Suddenly the soldier with a dark mustache grabbed Monsieur Rosenbaum by one arm. With his other fist he punched Monsieur Rosenbaum in the face.

Monsieur Rosenbaum's head snapped back. Blood sprayed from his nose. I screamed. I ran forward and threw myself between him and the soldier.

The soldier pushed me sideways, hard. I fell to the pavement, scraping my knees and biting the inside of my cheek.

The other soldier looked down at me and said, "Is this your father, little girl?"

I looked up at the three men. I tasted blood inside my mouth. My arms and legs, my entire body, froze. Only my head could move, and I shook it, to say no.

I shook my head.

"Well, then." The first soldier kicked me aside. He and the other soldier shoved Monsieur Rosenbaum into the back of a police van parked on the street. The van drove away, siren blaring.

We hadn't seen Monsieur Rosenbaum since.

I should have said yes, he was my father. I should have jumped to my feet. I should have fought them.

I should have done anything but what I had done.

I ran home breathless and threw up in the toilet at the end of our hall. Mama tucked me into her bed and I lay with my face against the wall, weeping. Before I could bring myself to tell my parents what had happened, neighbors were pounding on our door with the news. Mama thought it was a coincidence that I was sick. I never told her otherwise. I never confessed my shame.

Monsieur Rosenbaum ended up in a prison factory in Germany. He'd been able to send two letters home. Every time I heard sirens, my heart raced. I thought I would vomit all over again. Sometimes I did.

"Miri," my mother called through the open window.

Mama thought my fear of the police came from Kristallnacht, the night that caused us to flee Berlin. But there'd been no sirens then, even though our house caught fire. The German government had started the riot: They didn't come to the rescue.

"Miri," Mama called again. "Please come down. Nora's here asking for you."

I sat up. Nora was Madame and Monsieur Rosenbaum's little girl. She had just turned two years old—she'd been a tiny baby when Monsieur Rosenbaum was arrested. I had loved her since the moment she was born.

I climbed down from the roof more carefully than I'd gone up.

"Gut margn, Miriam," said Madame Rosenbaum. That was Yiddish for "good morning."

"Gut margn, Miri!" Nora toddled across the floor and held her skinny arms out to me.

I propped the red geranium back onto the grille, out of Nora's reach, and swooped her into my arms.

"Dit 'bonjour,'" I said to her. *Say good morning.* In French.

Nora laughed. "Fromage!" she said instead. *Cheese!*

"*Fromage?*" I said, tickling her. "You're the fromage! Fromage, fromage!"

Nora howled. "Fromage!" she shrieked.

"Fromage!" I shrieked.

Madame Rosenbaum rolled her eyes with a slight smile. "I'm waiting for her to forget that. *Fromage, dommage*—not such a difference." She spoke in Yiddish except for the two rhyming French words.

Fromage means "cheese." *Dommage* means "Too bad!" When Madame Rosenbaum confused the two a week ago, Nora had burst out laughing. "She won't forget," I said. "It's too funny."

Madame Rosenbaum said, "Also she'll have you to remind her."

"True." I grinned.

"Fromage." Nora sighed happily. She leaned her head against my shoulder and tucked the two middle fingers of her left hand into her mouth.

I spoke French fluently, unlike my mother and Madame Rosenbaum. Papa had been a language teacher in Germany and he'd taught me French from when I was a baby. Even if that hadn't been true, all my school classes were of course taught in French. Almost everyone living in the Pletzl was Jewish. Many of us, like my parents and I, were recent immigrants, and the adults tended to speak the language of whatever country they came from. Mama and Madame Rosenbaum had learned some French but mostly spoke Yiddish, or German, as well, of course, as Hebrew, the Jewish language of prayer.

"Gut Shabbos," Madame Rosenbaum said to me now.

I smiled. "Gut Shabbos," I said back. It was Friday, so Shabbos, the Jewish Holy Day, began at sundown. In happy anticipation, we said *Gut Shabbos*—Yiddish for "Good Shabbos"—all Friday long.

Mama said, "Madame Rosenbaum is tired, Miri, and Nora needs an early nap. Will you do their marketing as well as ours?"

"Um," I said. I didn't want to go out on the street, and my mother knew it. "If *you* do the marketing," I said, "I'll clean the apartment for Shabbos. Both apartments." Madame Rosenbaum and Nora lived next door to us. Monsieur Rosenbaum too, before.

Mama spread her arms. "One room apiece, Miri," she said. "There's almost nothing to clean."

In Germany our house had had three bedrooms, a lovely parlor, and a bright garden that edged up against a little woods. We'd had green space and beautiful things.

Nora pointed toward the cupboard. "Hungry," she said. "Eat?"

My mother got up quickly. "How could I forget? We have a treat for you, Nora habibi." She opened our cupboard and took out the small paper-wrapped lump sitting beside a half-loaf of stale bread.