

## The Death Train by Evie Burton

Based on a true story of the 999 women.

I screamed as the black uniformed soldier violently threw my father to the ground. I ran towards him, catching a glimpse of his terrified face before I was shoved back by another soldier. A wave of panic shot through me as I tried to push my way through the sea of soldiers; A ear shattering bang rang in my ears. A blur of red flashed before my eyes before I was shoved back.

I heard the blood curdling scream as I was dragged into the back of a lorry. Fear and panic erupted inside of me as I curled up into a ball. a whirlwind of emotions hurling inside of me, as I cried silently to myself.

Edith? Edith!" I was awoken by my sister shaking me. I exhaled. It was just another nightmare.

"Look what I found outside our house!" Lea's voice startled me as I slowly opened my eyes, grimacing by the sudden change in light.

Good morning to you too." I grumbled.

She ignored me and shoved a piece of paper in my face.

"It's a note, they are pinned to every house on our street. It says: all Jewish or unmarried girls from 16 up can register to be on the new female workforce on the 20th of March 1942 at the school. That's today!"

I yawned.

"And you're planning to do this?" I asked.

"Yes, it sounds fun. Mother wants us to go anyway." I roll my eyes. Typical Lea, always trying to impress mother.

"What kind of work is it?"

"In a factory, making boots for the army."

"Well, if I don't have to go, I'm not." I replied.

"Oh come on Edith, it's not that long. Mother said it will finish by lunch time. Anyway, you will have to deal with a lecture about serving your country and all that by mother ... " Lea pleaded. She hated doing anything by herself. She was right about mother lecturing though. I don't know if I can deal with that today.

I mumbled a "fine" and rolled over in my bed.

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Three hours later...

I trudged towards the school gate, my mother and Lea trailing behind. I noticed some other girls from my school entering, giggling amongst themselves. Once we reached the entrance, I turned and gave mother a quick kiss goodbye, not wanting to attract much attention.

"I'll see you at lunchtime, so we can celebrate Shabbat." she called. I continued walking but stopped when I noticed Lea was not following. I turned around to see that she was hugging mother. I rolled

my eyes and continued towards the school. I reached the gate to be greeted by a mass of people huddled at the entrance.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a SS officer standing upright and very still, watching as the girls lined up. I shuddered, feeling the familiar pang of dread slice up my back. He had the same identical cold, hard stare that they all had, as if they were interrogating you; it was as if they could see into your soul. What was he doing here? There was something suspicious and rather out of the ordinary about those black uniformed soldiers. Something about his presence made me feel uneasy. I shivered although I was not cold at all, but rather a much deeper, unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach. Nervously I joined the every growing queue of girls of whom I mostly recognised from my village and school, all roughly my age. Lea appeared next to me, grabbing my hand and talking excitedly about Shabbat. Her face dropped when she noticed the SS officer. I squeezed her hand and gave her the most comforting smile I could muster, but secretly they scared me too. The queue disappeared gradually and soon we found ourselves standing in front of a stern-faced man dressed in military uniform.

“Names and surnames.” He barked, his expression not changing.

“Edith Friedman” I replied, glaring at him back. I nudged Lea.

“Erm, Lea Friedman,” Lea stuttered.

Follow through this door and wait for further instruction. next!”

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We waited in the hall for hours, as the girls gradually trickled through the door in pairs until there we filled the entire room. Everyone huddled together, talking excitedly with one another.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed one officer pushing a girl through a back exit at the end of the hall. Suddenly everything happened at once.

The officers and military personnels began shouting that everyone needed to follow immediately. Chaos erupted in the hall as everyone began moving at once, flustered by the sudden urgency. I exchanged looks with Lea, her face matching the same confused expression as everyone.

We followed through the door, tailing behind the cluster of girls. Where were we going? A wave of confusion washed over me, as I tried to make sense of what was going on.

All of a sudden, I heard desperate shouts coming from the school entrance. I swiveled around. To my surprise, I saw distressed looking mothers shouting at a nearby officer from behind the wall. He ignored her and continued to usher the girls away. I stopped dead in my tracks. Something was not right.

“Lea don’t follow the officers, I don’t trust them.” I turned, expecting to see Lea next to me but to my horror she had vanished.

“Lea!” I raised my voice more urgently this time, panic growing by the second. I pushed through the bodies, scanning through the crowd desperately. I started running, a mix of fear and dread boiling inside of me as I came to a halt. I recognised this place. Suddenly a train whizzed past and came to an abrupt stop. I watched in horror as the officers began pushing the girls on the train.

“Lea!” I shouted my voice hoarse as panic rose to my throat. We had to get out of here. My heart thumped violently in my chest, as I searched for an exit.

“Edith!” A voice shrieked. I swiveled round to see Lea being hurled onto the train by an officer. Without hesitation I sprinted towards the train, pushing through the sea of bodies until I reached the train door.

“Lea, get off the train now, we have to go!” I cried,

Sensing the desperation in my voice, she leapt off the train. I grabbed her hand and pulled her away. We started running, barging through the crowd until I finally saw the exit.

All of a sudden, someone grabbed my arm and flung me backwards aggressively. I stumbled, and fell to the ground. A large, bulky officer lumbered towards me.

“Where do you think you're going?” He growled, spit flying from his mouth as he spoke.

He seized my collar and dragged me towards the train. I wriggled and squirmed, shouting at him but his grasp was too firm. The next thing I knew I was hurtled onto the train, my shoulder taking most of the impact. Dazed, I rubbed my shoulder, and staggered up. The train suddenly lurched causing me to stumble forward. A stab of panic shot through me as I realized what was happening. It was too late. I scrambled up, searching for Lea desperately. The train was picking up speed rapidly; I watched the world and my freedom whizz past me. I ran to the door, just in time to see Lea on the station. A wave of relief passed over me briefly. At least she hadn't been taken. But the gnawing ache of being apart sent spasms through my stomach. My breath was shaky and shallow as I curled up in a ball, and squeezed my eyes feeling the most small and vulnerable I had ever felt. I cried silently as the birds chirped from the Tatra mountains and the train puffed along on to the place of my wildest nightmares.