

# DANCING IN THE RAIN

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## In the mourning

Sam Wheeler

Long before the sirens wailed, the hum of Messerschmitts broke the silence of the night.

The city of London slept restlessly; it tossed and turned, unable to take respite from its fear. As agitated dogs barked to warn of the approaching terror, spotlights pierced the sky, frantically searching for the imminent.

London panicked as the bombs began to drop. Glass shattered. Walls crumbled. Fires glared balefully in the city darkness. Lives ruptured. Mothers scrambled desperately to find their young as old men stumbled from their hearths, hustling towards bomb shelters, clutching precious moments and memories.

Deafening alarms and the torturous wrath of Fritz-muted screams. The rumbling vibrations of the assault could be felt miles away, while colossal shadows of the enemy aircraft brought the Nazi triumph closer.

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George Abbott shuffled through the smouldering ruins, his mind a jumble of hatred, dread and memories. Smoke filled his senses, as did fury. He had come, as he did each morning, to deliver milk to his customers. But the city was decimated; it had been reduced to rubble. Shards of metal and glass lay strewn above and over the road. Bricks covered the ground. *Isn't it enough that you killed my brother? Now this?*

His dairy was some twenty miles from here, and while his farm had not been affected by the bombings, his heart was. These people were like family to him. Dear Mrs Mangle, with her stories and smiles. Old Man Smith, with his glistening eyes and quiet ways. Bertie Walters. Would George find them dead or alive? He had already lost Archie in this wretched war. His milk bottles clinked as he trembled.



At milking time, George was filled with rage once more. ‘Those bastards,’ he said, as the German POWs walked towards the sheds to begin their milking.

They had been captured a few months prior, these vermin, and issued to farmers to help feed Britain. George despised them; worse, he hated them with a bitterness that was malignant. But the Army had forced his hand. They established their base beyond the main house, and now at dawn and dusk, George came face to face with his pain, his anger. A vile hatred for anything German arose within him.

Following the milking, George had to load several gallons of milk onto the cart. ‘You there, you Kraut. Over here. Help me load these milk cans.’

Hans Kaufmann walked slowly, head down, hands buried deep in his pockets.

The words went straight through him. His English was good enough to know what the farmer wanted; his mental state, however, was not.

‘You, Nazi. Don’t act dumb. Come lift these barrels onto the cart.’ George coughed with the effort, gesticulating crossly to Hans.

Hans ambled to the cart, his face expressionless. He knew very well what to do, having grown up on a dairy farm back in Germany. He lifted the cargo with ease, one at a time, with no intent to please the Englishman. Once finished, he reburied his hands into his pockets and continued the walk back to his compatriots.

‘Damn Nazi,’ George uttered under his breath. ‘He’s lucky to be alive.’

In the morning, George ventured to the POW quarters to assign daily chores. Approaching Hans, he noticed the German holding a letter. He was weeping. Never had George seen a grown man cry in such a fashion. Tears plummeted down Hans’ cheeks, his distorted face unable to hide his pain.

Making his presence known, George spoke abruptly. ‘Kraut. Cows. Now.’

Hans looked up, obviously distressed, but George had no sympathy. Hans folded the letter and placed it on his kit. He then stood — towering over George — and headed towards the dairy.

George was filled with a strange sense of satisfaction that the German was hurting.

‘Good,’ he muttered, his thoughts turning once more to Archie. ‘Deserves everything he gets.’

Once the camp was empty, George did something — something he would never normally do. He picked up the letter that Hans had been clutching. His German was not strong, however, he searched for familiar words. He saw two names — Katarina and Rolf. He also recognised ‘Blitzkrieg’ and ‘getotet’ — killed. A photograph of a young woman holding her son in her arms fell. George suddenly understood. Hans, too, was mourning the death of his loved ones. He was suffering just as George was. George wanted to feel triumphant. Avenged. Instead, he felt empty.

In the pre-dawn hours, George heard the distressed calls of a cow in labour. In the corner of the paddock, he saw the pregnant cow. She was lying on the grass, ready to give birth, but her position and bellowing told of a breached calf. George was inexperienced with delivering breaches — Archie had been so deft with his hands in these situations. George had little idea of what to do, but the cow would surely die if he did nothing. The calf too. He was sick of death. Sick of it. He had to save their lives.

Moments later, Hans appeared from the darkness. He, too, had heard the poor mother. George looked up, astonished, but appreciative of the assistance. Hans had helped his father deliver such calves back home. Without speaking, Hans reached in and gently — ever so gently, turned the calf in the womb.

‘Almost there,’ said George, stroking the hollering mother reassuringly. The first rays of the new day began to peak from the horizon.

Guiding the calf out carefully, Hans ushered the newborn into the world. There it lay, exhausted but alive. Its mother rested; the ordeal had passed.

Hans looked up at George. They couldn’t help but smile. In this wretched, wretched war, with so much heartache and loss, they had saved not one, but two lives.

The two men — so different, yet so alike — sat, exhausted but relieved.



**Sam Wheeler** wrote this in 2015 when he was in Year 11 at St Peters Lutheran College in Queensland.