



An Eagle in the Snow

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Michael Morpurgo's new book was inspired by the true story of Private Henry Tandey, the most decorated Private of World War I.

This book is set in World War 2. Barney and his mum are taking the train to Cornwall via London, having lost all their possessions in the Coventry bombings. Sitting opposite them is a man who Barney soon recognises as the air-raid warden who had carried him down from the rubble of his former home. It's not long into the journey when the train comes under attack from a German plane, and is forced to shelter in a tunnel. Barney is terrified, more by the dark than the attack. The man lights a match, but he only has four and they won't last long, so to while away the time he tells the story of Billy Byron.

The man has known Billy all his life. They were in an orphanage together, joined the army together, and when the First World War broke out, were sent to Belgium together. One day they marched past a small girl crying and shivering by the side of the road. Billy, against the orders of the Sergeant, insisted on taking her to a field hospital, thereby saving her life. He never forgot their encounter. Billy drew endless pictures of the girl Christine, talked about her all the time, and said that he would do everything he could to end the war as quickly as possible so children like her would not have to suffer. This, the man said, was the reason why Billy volunteered for the most dangerous jobs, took incredible risks, and fought as hard as he could to destroy the enemy; he wasn't interested in the rights or wrongs of war, or in being brave, he just wanted it to be over. At the end of their last, victorious battle, a lone German soldier emerged from the smoke, but Billy forbade anyone from killing him ? there was no need as they'd clearly already won the war. Peacetime came, Billy eventually tracked down Christine and they ended up getting married. Life was good ? until Hitler came into power. When Hitler's face filled the screen at the local cinema, Billy suddenly recognised him ? he was the German whose life he'd saved. Billy realised that had he killed him, he would have prevented another war, and he is determined to make amends for this mistake.

Billy's story is loosely based on Tandey's, although Morpurgo has embellished the facts to create a moving, gripping, sometimes heart-warming account. At the same time, he looks at possible reasons for extreme bravery and guilt, and shows how even our very best actions can have disastrous consequences.

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