

The Last Letter

As one of the Axis powers, Hungary had a minimal Nazi-German presence until 1944, when the pro-Fascist Arrow Cross Party began their reign of terror. Jews were deported to concentration camps or shot and thrown into the Danube.

Irene Csanyi was born into a wealthy family in Szeged. She lost her husband to cancer in 1936. Her daughter Gabriella went to London before the war; her son Charles was dispatched to the forced labour camps in 1943. Irene kept herself locked away in the family apartment in Budapest, seeing no one but the elderly concierge; out on the streets, the Arrow Cross stalked the city's remaining Jews. One day in October, she ventured out, leaving behind everything she owned. And an extraordinary letter.

This setting of her letter is a personal tribute to a relative whose courage and strength outlasted her hope, and a monument to every Hungarian Jew who suffered in 1944.

Meine lieben Kinder,

Ich sage auf wiedersehen. Es schmerzt mich sehr dass ich nicht bei euch sein kann, im Geiste bin ich da.

Habt Euch lieb und vergesst mich nicht. Diese worte wird Frau Fold Euch überbringen sie war in der ganzen Zeit meineinziger trost. Sie ist eine liebe Frau, eine gute Seele.

Ihr könnt Euch treffen mit Doktor Ussetty Béla mein'm Notar; der sich um meine Anliegen kümmert.

Karolykám Du kannst Vier Tausend Pengo im Waisenhaus abholen. Gaby mein liebbling, meine Kleidung und Pelzmäntel sind alle Dein, falls etwas bleibt. Charles wird wissen was zu tun ist.

Kleiner Charles, Deine Postkarte ein' echte freude war meine letzte freude.

Verkauft die Häuser und geht in die Ferne.

Tausend Tausend Küsse Meine aller lieb sten. Seid von Eurer traurigen Mutter umarmt.

My beloved children,

I'm saying farewell.

The pain of being so far from you is unbearable, but know that I'm with you in spirit.

Love each other and don't forget me. Mrs. Fold will see that this note gets to you. She has been a great comfort to me through all of this: she is a good soul.

You can rely on my lawyer, Dr. Bela Usetty. He handles all my affairs.

Dearest Charles, you will be able to claim some money at the orphans' court. Gaby, my darling, my clothes and furs, if any survive, will be yours.

Charles will know what to do.

My little Charles, the last thing that brought me happiness was the postcard you sent through Louis's friend.

Sell up and go abroad!

A million kisses, my dearest ones, and embraces.

Your sad, loving mother.