

FOR THE RECORD

A story about defiance, documentation, and the power of history

The silence. It was unfathomable.

How could this many people make this little noise? A tiny cough here, a shuffle of a foot there. Something that told you people inhabited the space. But here, no. No, this was something else. This was death alive.

They were on a boat, in the hold below the waterline, sitting on long, wooden benches. More people than Evie could count. They were a people who had given up on life, resignation rather than rage filled their eyes. How had they managed to instill such hopelessness in so many?

Two soldiers walked up and down the middle aisle, daring anyone to move. But no one moved. No one spoke.

Evie could not remember how they had arrived here. Or where they had come from. Were they prisoners? Slaves? She could barely remember anything.

She shook her head. The movement itself feeling too loud.

Where were they going? She did not know. No one seemed curious. No one seemed anything.

She awoke. Or at least became aware again. She had no idea how long she had been asleep. Or awake. No sense of time.

As she regained awareness, though, she could tell something had shifted. Something in the air. It was still silent. Her benchmates still held that same lifeless expression. But something else was there too. She could feel it.

Fear. It was fear. Oozing out of every orifice. Seeping onto the floor like a heavy fog, moving swiftly among

the benches, tendrils climbing up the backs of the prisoners.

Evie felt it. Smelled it. Breathed it in and almost choked.

And then, she heard it.

A soft, muffled sound, but unmistakable. A shuffling sound and then another.

Bang.
Shuffle.
Bang.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A. Sebesta writes speculative fiction rooted in historical truth.

Her stories blend historical fact, moral courage, and just enough science fiction to make us see the present differently.

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Evie risked a glance backward. The bench four rows back was empty. A man from the next row stood up and walked into the dark doorway at the back, a gun being prodded into his back by a soldier the whole way.

Bang.

The next woman stood up and shuffled to the back, same as the last man.

Bang. Shuffle.

Evie froze. Couldn't breathe. Fear threatened to escape from her lungs, desperate to scream.

No, no, no. This couldn't be happening. Evie shook her head again, trying to think straight.

Bang. Shuffle.

Bang. Shuffle.

She dared another glance. The third row was almost empty now.

She struggled with all her might to think about where she was. How she got here. Who she was before this. Her mind was blank.

Bang. Shuffle.

Bang. Shuffle.

Bang. Shuffle.

Think, Evie, think. What were you doing yesterday? When was yesterday? What day of the week was it? She wondered if time was really an illusion. A construct created by man to explain the world around them.

Evie laughed. Here she was, moments from dying, and she was having a philosophical debate with herself about the constructs of time. That seemed only appropriate for her.

A spark. A small remembrance. Something about herself. She was a thinker. She was an annoying thinker. One of those who pose unknowable questions just for the sport of thinking.

Aha! She felt triumphant. Like this small memory of herself was in some way significant.

Bang. Shuffle.

The bang snapped her back to reality.

She saw that the row directly behind her had started to empty. Only a few more souls before it would be her.

Bang. Shuffle.

Bang. Shuffle.

“The fear was consuming her, like a fire. Her very insides buzzed with electricity.”

As the soldier got to her row, Evie thought she was going to combust. The fear was consuming her, like a fire. Her very insides buzzed with electricity.

Three more people.

Bang. Shuffle.

Two more.

Bang. Shuffle.

As the man next to her began to stand, Evie jumped up.

“Wait!” she yelled. The sound, horrific against the silence, reverberated against the walls.

“What?” the soldier in charge of her row snarled as he stared at her. He was a big man, too big for his uniform, and the bottom button of his shirt threatened to burst at any moment. As if it would pop off if the man so much as laughed. But there was no laughter here.

She put her hands up in a gesture of peace, of calm.

“You, uh, you haven't taken our names, Sir.” Evie replied tentatively, unsure herself what she was saying, but driven by fear to say something, anything.

“Your names?” He repeated, incredulous, but slightly curious. As if the absurdity of the response itself warranted a reply.

“Oh yes. You must take our names,” Evie said this with such confidence that the man looked at his counterpart for verification. The other soldier shrugged, confused as the first.

“Look,” Evie said, gaining momentum, “you have to take our names. Didn't your supervisor tell you that? You always have to take down the names.”

The two soldiers looked at each other, a bit tentatively, as if maybe, just maybe, there was an inkling of doubt in their minds about what they were doing.

Evie pounced on that thread.

"I don't know what to tell you, but you have to take our names down. You can't just go on doing this without recording our names."

She glanced between the two, trying to decide who was going to crack first.

"Look," she said again, choosing the soldier closest to her and directing her question to him. "What's the harm? Get a sheet of paper and start writing down names. If you didn't need to do it, who cares? Throw it away later. But I'm telling you. You have to take our names."

The two men looked at each other, still stunned. It was obvious no one had ever spoken up before and they were unprepared for what to do. Finally, the soldier closest to her moved to the other and began whispering.

A moment later, he disappeared into the same dark doorway the others had gone into.

The first soldier just stared at her. Still trying to decide if she was for real.

Then, just as suddenly as he had walked out, the soldier came back in, holding a yellow legal pad. Like those that were used in important offices, for important meetings. By people who wanted to feel important.

Another spark. Evie silently cheered in her mind at this latest memory. People went to offices and had meetings. People wanted to feel important. It wasn't a good memory, but a memory nonetheless.

The soldier handed the legal pad and pen to the prisoner sitting next to her. The man began to slowly write his name.

"No, no, no," Evie said. "You have to get all our data. Not just our names. Our date of birth. Our hometown. Everything. Or else, you've got nothing."

Evie grabbed the notepad and began making columns.

She was most of the way through writing when she heard a yell from the front of the boat.

"Oy! What's happening back here? Why have you stopped?"

Evie thought to herself, was that Russian? Japanese? A touch of Turkish? She couldn't quite place it. She

was normally very good at discerning accents, and it bothered her that she couldn't figure it out.

Another spark. Another memory.

I have to keep them talking, she thought, not only for my life, but to know where they're from.

"Talking so they weren't killing."

She chuckled at this: which was more insistent, her curiosity or her desire to live? Either way, she had to keep them talking. Talking so they weren't killing.

A brusque woman arrived at Evie's row and upon seeing her, Evie still couldn't place her origin.

"What's this?" She asked, peering at the odd scene in front of her.

"We have to take the names," the second soldier replied, gulping. He looked more scared than any of the prisoners.

"Names? What names?" The officer scoffed.

"...the...the names of the prisoners," the first soldier stammered.

"Why?" She asked this curiously, again, the absurdity of the response leading to curiosity.

The two soldiers looked at each other uncomfortably. They clearly weren't going to say that a prisoner had told them to do it.

Evie stood up again.

"How will you prove you're the greatest killing machine on Earth if you don't have the names?"

"Because," Evie began, looking the officer straight in the eye, "how will you prove you're the greatest killing machine on Earth if you don't have the names?"

The officer looked stunned. She marched down the row, stopping directly in front of Evie.

"We are the greatest killing machine this planet has ever known. And we don't need the names of the likes of you. You are insects. Rats. Parasites. We don't need to remember you ever existed."

She spat out the last words.

Evie could see no link between herself and the other prisoners, nor anything distinctive linking the soldiers. Religion? Political affiliation? There was no way to know what random trait had earned this group the title of parasites and truthfully, it didn't really matter. People have been creating divisive distinctions for centuries and this one would inevitably be as insignificant.

"Yes, you think that," Evie replied, with just enough edge that she knew she needed to get her anger under control if this was going to work. "You don't need the names, but the rest of the world does. Your enemies do. How will they fear you if they don't have proof of what you're capable of?"

The officer lifted an eyebrow, showing enough curiosity that Evie continued.

"Look," she said again – apparently "look" was her catchphrase – "you remember the Nazis? Terrible lot. Killed so many. But so organized. So meticulous in their records. Even a hundred years later, even after multiple attempts to deny the Holocaust, you can't. The records speak for themselves. They. Took. Names."

Evie punctuated each word in her last sentence, then took a deep breath before she added, "And if you want that new weaponry of yours to be worth anything, you'll need records."

That got the officer's attention. Her head snapped in Evie's direction. "How do you know about that?"

The truth was she didn't, she was guessing. A hunch based on historical patterns. A new political movement arises, blames a minority for all their society's ills, rises in popularity, and once in power, harnesses a new technology that sets them apart from other nations. Hungry for more power, they set off to take over the world. Violently. A tale as old as time.

But maybe it would keep her alive a few more moments. And if they'd let her keep talking, she'd have them so twisted up and confused, she knew she could walk right off the ship.

Sparks flew as memories flooded back in.

Her name was Evelyn (Evie) Belvedere, Ms. B. for short, history teacher and detective.



Thank you for reading.

If you enjoyed this story, please share it with someone. Independent authors grow almost entirely through word of mouth. And stories don't really exist until they're shared.

This story was first shared publicly at the **August 8 Open Mic at Pennington's Bookstore** in Chattanooga, Tennessee. A special thanks to Pennington's for championing local authors and independent books. Check them out at: 400 E. Main St., Suite 150, Chattanooga, TN (penningtonsbks.com).

If *For the Record* sparked your imagination, I hope you'll explore my other books and stay in touch. I'd love to share what's next.

— A. Sebesta

ALSO BY A. SEBESTA

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