

the battle of
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CHAPTER 1

“You don’t believe in fairies.” The professor scowled over his glasses at Heinrich, who sat up in his crib and giggled at his father. “There is no such thing; you hear me? Say it!” He was angry now and as he screamed little bits of spit flew from his mouth and landed on Heinrich like rain.

“He can barely say anything. He has no idea what you’re talking about.” Heinrich’s mother was soft and gentle, and as she picked him up, her red hair ran over Heinrich’s face and made him feel safe. Heinrich was already three and should have been out of his crib, but there was a war going on and the chance of finding a new bed was very slim. Finding

a place to put it would have been impossible.

Heinrich lived with his mother and father in a single room of an old farmhouse. There were other families in all the different rooms and holes in the wall that let the cold winter breeze through, but the room was so small that their body heat mostly kept them warm.

Toys were non-existent and entertainment for Heinrich was limited. When he found a red pencil in the field, he was elated; but when he decided to draw his fairy on his father's documents, his father – the professor – was not impressed.

Most of the other children Heinrich's age were already talking, but Heinrich didn't talk unless he really had to. Instead, he loved to draw. Any other three-year-old's drawing of a fairy could easily be misinterpreted as a mongoose playing piano or an echidna on a picnic, but there was no doubt that Heinrich had drawn a fairy. The fairy was flying over the words 'top secret' and was easily the most beautiful thing in the entire document.

"Put him down. He understands me fine." The professor was not a large man in height or stature, but he could be very cruel. His wife, though in love with his brilliant mind, was scared of his vicious temper. She placed Heinrich back in his crib and

stepped away.

“Say it,” the professor snapped at Heinrich.
“Say it now.”

It should have been a very simple thing for Heinrich to copy, but it was much more difficult than anyone suspected. For at that very moment a fairy, full of colour and life, was tap-dancing on the professor’s bald head. It took every fibre of Heinrich’s little being not to burst into fits of laughter.

Heinrich’s fairy was smaller than most, though the fairy had no idea as he had never spent a moment away from Heinrich in his entire life. Vug, for that was the fairy’s name, was completely dedicated to his principal. He knew that with such a cruel father and because of the terrifying world around his principal, there was very little chance that Vug’s time here would last long, so he made sure he took advantage of every moment of Heinrich’s life. He tried to make it as pleasurable as possible.

Long night raids were common: blasting sirens, blazing planes and the long whistles of distant nightmares being dropped that would rattle the window frames in all the rooms. Many saw Heinrich as incredibly brave, but really the absurd show Vug performed at the first sound of an air raid made all the difference. The little fairy would pull out his

orb and cover the ceiling with a technicolour light show or make elephants run across the walls and crash into oak trees.

No. Heinrich couldn't say he didn't believe in fairies because he did, and Vug was the only friend he had ever known. The tiny fairy, no bigger than a pencil, had jet-black hair that fell around his face and the longest, lightest wings that lifted him effortlessly across the room.

The sound of skin on skin shocked everyone, especially Heinrich, who not only didn't realise he had been laughing at his father but also couldn't understand why suddenly his cheek was so very sore. There was a long pause before the screaming and the tears started, but they did not last long before there was another loud smack and Heinrich fell silent again. His cheek now pulsed with pain and his bottom lip was bleeding.

"Say there are no fairies. A child must not waste time on such things. Say it now." The professor had his arm raised high in the air, the shadow falling across Heinrich's face. His mother was whimpering in the corner, her arm covering her eyes.

"No mairies." Heinrich had never been able to say his f's.

"Again," the professor barked.

“No mairies,” said the small boy, his eye starting to swell. Tears rolled down his swollen face and dripped onto the bed linen.

“Say it again.” The professor stood over his son and stared down at him. He seemed convinced that daydreaming was the most dangerous thing anyone could do. The world had turned cold and the professor believed that his son would need to be equally cold to survive it. The professor was too smart to have an imagination and apparently couldn’t understand how one could find peace in something so fickle.

“Heinrich love Vug. No mairies.”

Pronunciation didn’t matter and apparently neither did intent as Vug’s vibrant colour was ripped from his frail body. The sudden departure of his colour and warmth forced Vug to the floor, his wings like lead weights pulling him to the ground. He kicked and shook like a cockroach that had been sprayed with bug spray.

Heinrich looked down at his friend in pain and burst into tears again. This time no stern look or strike from his father was going to make him stop. The professor stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Heinrich’s mother rushed to her son’s side and hugged him so tightly he almost

couldn't breathe.

Vug, knowing that his pain was only going to cause his principal discomfort, slowly rose to his feet and then with a small flutter rose a little higher. He pulled his orb from his pocket and smiled at Heinrich, and then closed his eyes. In an instant all three of them were gone.

Heinrich and his mother found themselves in a small village three counties away where they were looked after by a kind, elderly woman who had seen too much hate in the world to offer them anything but compassion and love. She never questioned why they appeared on her doorstep with no belongings and no idea how they had gotten there. Her village was small and people didn't ask questions. Her beds were warm and she had plenty of soup. Heinrich had a bed of his own where he slept soundly for the first time in his life. He dreamed of Vug having adventures all of his own.

Vug, on the other hand, with no colour or magic, had no control over where he was going at all. His orb still felt warm when nothing else did and so he closed his eyes and held it tight. He gave in to his orb and let it decide his fate and his destination. It seemed to know it was time he left and where he needed to go.