

warstories 2



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# WAR

at a morgue  
in the cold city  
a man works  
all day  
washing bodies  
trying to piece  
together the  
dead. Hands,  
arms and legs  
litter the bath  
room. “We  
don’t know what  
belong to  
who,” he says  
grimly. “Over  
the war, he’s  
driven his  
hearse at least  
2000 times



# WAR

if I could not talk, nobody would know

When they came to my farm I said, “Do you have children?” and when he said “yes,” I pleaded, “Please think about our children.” He said, “it doesn’t interest me. Lets start.” And then 14 of the 15 men were dead, their bodies covered with straw, doused with gasoline. His face once bronzed, not is lips reduced to pus and scabs and bloody sores bubble from his single hair, cheeks dried white and black, bandages streaked red by blood and iodine. “All the men were killed,” he says, “their blood trickled down my face. I didn’t dare breathe, smelled the gasoline. The bodies on top of me protected me a little but the heat became intense. I didn’t know if there were any still there, if crawling out would mean my certain death. Finally I knew I’d be burned alive, I pushed the body aside and opened the straw with my hands. That’s when my face and hands were burned. I rolled out screaming, my clothes on fire. I pulled them off, stripping flesh from my nails, ran screaming into the yard where I found some water. That helped me find my senses. On the street, 20 corpses, cousins, a brother. I ran to my uncle’s house, found my father, uncle, all elderly men-they didn’t recognize me at first, hid me in the basement, put yogurt on my burns. I was conscious. I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t move my hands. A week later, someone came to the house, put me in the back of a tractor carrying elderly men and we made it to the border

# September 11 2002



my new kitten has  
found a new game  
as she does daily,  
attack toilet paper,  
toss the green  
beans up in the  
air and pounce on it.  
Mouse rehearsal.  
She is so small  
and wild, hardly  
afraid of anything  
except maybe  
the printer spewing  
white mysteries  
and making a  
clicking noise. I  
Was so unafraid a  
year ago, brash  
as she is running  
for the train, no  
fear of plans.  
Riding upstate,  
wild to see the  
Empire State  
Building, towers  
like my mother  
who asked in  
her last days where  
she'd go with  
the little life she  
had left beamed  
"New York City"

# September 11 2002



For my new cat  
it's a day of  
discovering  
new thing: wind  
and the thrill of  
unrolling toilet  
paper. Maybe  
mew babies are  
what keep the  
young widows  
alive, something  
to live for when  
hate unfolds  
like some man  
eating plant. I  
try to imagine  
a mother whose  
son died because  
he wanted to  
help someone in  
a wheel chair,  
how she could  
walk by his  
old room and  
not want to lie  
down in his quilt  
and never leave



# 1944

with the last transport  
we were all together.  
We couldn't understand.  
All together in one

corner of the carriage.  
I didn't understand why  
there were the old people.  
We thought it was to

work. We didn't know  
Auschwitz. Some of  
us tried to jump. Then  
they called out names,

It all went wrong, Then  
we saw our parents  
for the last time



# 1944

we talked and laughed,  
never about serious things.  
We had to wear a boiler  
suit because we'd gone  
into hiding. We talked  
about boyfriends we'd  
met we talked about  
food we'd eat if we  
ever got out





# IN ONE SHOT

only a small plume  
of smoke, hardly there  
at the right of the  
square where every  
thing else looks  
ordinary. A brown  
cube like a Rothko  
painting, still, long,  
quiet calm. A few  
birds gliding thru  
the clear air that  
you could never  
believe were  
people jumping



# WE HEARD PARIS HAD FALLEN

we felt we'd stay  
here. Then there  
was news of an  
other transport.  
Several days  
before the  
political prisoners  
were hauled up,  
the charges read..  
But I got a  
horrid feeling  
that that was  
the last transport  
Sept 23

# YOUR HEART WOULD BREAK

and there was nothing  
you could do. The  
children expected so  
much of life. Yes  
we heard of the  
extermination camps  
but we had no say,  
had to wait and see.  
If the worst was  
to happen, we didn't  
want to know



My mother always re-packed the trunk.  
My sister stayed in the car, ate bologna sandwiches.  
When we were younger we let our dolls turn  
brown in the air.  
Packing for them was better than going

My sister stayed in the car, as if leaving now  
to be difficult.

My father wrote down every penny he spent.  
Packing for vacation was better than going  
We ate at Bill and Thelma's for 99 cents a dinner.

My father kept a notebook where he wrote every  
cent he spent.

My mother had to coax him to go to musical theaters.  
We ate at Bill and Thelma's every night.  
When I saw Brigadoon I wanted to never come back  
from fantasy.

My mother had to coax him to go to the musicals.  
She beamed when he liked it.  
I wanted to dance, live in a dream, never come  
back  
We needed the mists of the gloaming to blur  
what wasn't said in the car

My mother beamed when my mother liked  
anything.

My sister was the beauty, better at ballet and boys.  
I wanted to live in a dream, in fog.  
My mother with her own dreams of father  
named me Rosalyn Diana

My mother beamed at almost everything I did.  
After she died, a theater bought her clothes from the 40's.  
At least her clothes would be on stage.  
She would have beamed, she would have liked being there  
to repack them.

# Vacation

