

## OTTO DE KAT: NEWS FROM BERLIN 2014 (Bericht Uit Berlijn)

"News from Berlin", in its basic plot, is a story centered upon 4 main characters scattered across Europe in the late spring of 1941. First there is Oscar Verschuur, a Dutch diplomat posted to Switzerland, a neutral nation standing apart as one of the few oases on the war's periphery. Second: there is Oscar's daughter Emma and her husband Carl, a German she had married a few years earlier. Both work for the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, whose boss, Adam Trott, a smart, discerning and warm-hearted anti-Nazi, nurtures hopes of being able to save Germany from itself. Emma and Carl take a brief holiday to Switzerland, where Emma informs her father over lunch in a Geneva restaurant of the date of the imminent German attack on the Soviet Union. Its codename: Operation Barbarossa. Emma's reason for disclosing this explosive tidbit of information to her father is her hope that thus armed with this vital secret, he'll inform his superiors and friends in Britain with the aim of frustrating Hitler's aim for new conquests, Russian oil, and Lebensraum.

And thirdly, there is Kate, Oscar's wife, who is living in London, where she works in a local hospital helping to administer care and bolster morale among wounded Allied soldiers. It becomes evident that a certain state of separateness suits them both. Both are open to having affairs, Oscar with a Dutch woman, Lara, that he has met skiing in Switzerland, Kate with Mateous, a Congolese soldier wounded in North Africa and brought to London.

After returning to Berlin, Emma informs Carl that she disclosed the date of Barbarossa to her father. Though greatly displeased, he kindly admonished Emma to be more circumspect in future. He appreciates her reasons for informing Oscar of the impending invasion.

But there is the haunting shadow of the Gestapo. He loves his wife so much that the prospect of her possibly ending up ensnared by the Gestapo makes him fearful for both their lives. Indeed, at one point, Emma is taken to Gestapo headquarters on Prinz Albrechtstrasse for questioning. Apparently, one of their spies noticed her whispering something to Oscar over lunch in Geneva. Emma manages to keep her cool and eludes suspicion.

Oscar is hesitant about sharing the news of Barbarossa with Morton, a friend of his in Britain with connections that go all the way up to Churchill himself. Nevertheless, he takes a nocturnal flight aboard a Swiss airliner from Lisbon to Bristol, from where he catches a train to London for a meeting with Morton. Later he surprises Kate by stopping by her flat. It is hardly an auspicious re-acquaintance for husband and wife.

What should he do?

Warn the world, or put his daughter's safety first?

The Gestapo are watching them both

. And with Stalin lulled by his alliance with Hitler, will anyone even listen?

The knowledge becomes like an infectious disease passed (intentionally) from daughter to father to mother, endangering the thin tissue of each receiver's existence and relationships without reducing

(as hoped) the burden on the person passing on the moral and practical demands that the secret requires of them.

De Kat's focus, however, is more than espionage and the moral dilemmas of wartime.

It also focuses on the members of the family, their relationships with each other and those closest to them.

The delicate balance of relationships changes as each comes into contact with the other.

New realities reveal themselves and confound the characters perhaps as much as their burdensome secret.

History in the family, as in life, intrudes and shapes the present in ways that the characters can't escape and can only vaguely comprehend.

While titanic military and political forces battle in epic struggles, individuals and families—at least those lucky enough to live—continue to try to live and maintain a semblance of ordinary life when the time is not ordinary at all. It is the clash between these two huge ideas - the family and power that give this short novel huge reading impact.

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