

Taken from a letter written by Prof. Dr. Victor Klemperer, Dresden-A. 34, Am Kirchberg 19, to Mr. and Mrs Berthold Meyerhof, New York.

20th June 1946

Dear Berthold, dear Phila,

It gave us such great joy to read your letter, which arrived yesterday. There are still at least some friends and relatives who have survived and are emerging from that awful pile of corpses, and some of them are coming to learn that we are strangely still alive...

We ourselves were saved in the most wonderful way, I in particular must have had half a dozen guardian angels, and even they would not have managed it had it not been for Eva's steely determination and her recently demonstrated cowboy-and-Indian virtues, which would not be out of place in a Karl May novel. I would have never made it through had she not held fast to the belief that our hour would come.

For years we have been tormented and it was never far from our minds that things would come to the most awful end. Our house and literally all of our possessions were taken from us. We were forced to live in apartment blocks specifically for Jews, shamed by so-called 'house searches', which were the real pogroms and torture sessions, carried out with fists, kicks, spitting, death threats and all other kinds of cruelty imaginable (for example, littering the beds with sewing needles, smearing the cushions with boot polish, etc., etc.) I myself was forced to work as a sweeper, spending day and night in factories doing work that was physically demanding and damaging to my health. Whenever I left the house in the morning or evening it meant saying goodbye to life, for anyone could be arrested on the street or in the factory and disappear forever—after a few weeks the widow would receive a death certificate from Auschwitz, in which it would state alternately that the cause of death had either been 'heart failure' or 'shot whilst attempting to escape.' It was with the Gestapo that I became familiar with interrogations. You have probably read what these interrogations involved, including solitary confinement without one's spectacles. I received only a fraction of the 'Aryan' food for years. Eva was herself at a disadvantage, because she belonged to a Jewish household. "You're a Jew's whore, worse than a Jewess-cow, you treacherous swine!" This was the usual salutation from the Gestapo, in between the punches, spitting, and choking. Eva had to share her all too scarce supply of food with me. All around us there was suicide after suicide, deportation after deportation, and the Gestapo's stereotypical phrase: "Are you pigs so poor that you can't buy ten pennies' worth of gas for yourselves? We'll come back and kill you eventually, but you could spare us the trouble!" The city grew emptier and emptier all around us. The only people left here were those in mixed marriages, but increasingly they were being done away with, too. Finally, the order came on the morning of the thirteenth of February 1945 for the last approximately seventy of those in mixed marriages in Dresden that on the sixteenth of February they were to be separated, and the Jewish spouses were to be deported. It was certainly their intention to gas us or shoot us right there in the train, they had to get rid of us. Then, on the night of the fourteenth of February came the obliterating bombs of the English that destroyed Dresden completely in forty minutes, leaving only the outskirts intact, with what they say was a quarter of a million people laying dead beneath the rubble. We were wrenched apart at the last moment. Eva was struck on the head by a casement

window. Her Prussian skull was able to withstand it, while splinters from an incendiary bomb injured my own face and eyes. We spent the whole night searching for one another amongst the bodies and the remains, both of us thinking the other must be dead. The next morning we found each other. It was then that I tore off the Star of David and we fled. If the Gestapo had caught us, they would hang both of us, (Eva for aiding the escape). Again and again we were confronted by dangers and difficulties, air raids and the threat of the Gestapo right up until we were deep within Upper Bavaria. It was there that the Americans finally came to liberate us. But now there was no possibility of being able to travel back. It was because of this that we made the return journey on foot from Munich to Dresden—a novel would be just as interesting, not to mention just as gruelling, to live out.

On the tenth of June 1945, we both made it back to Dresden, completely exhausted and dishevelled. The following day we reclaimed our house high above Dresden. But what a state it was in! Everything we owned, Eva's organ and piano, my library of 4,000 books, every chair, every cup, every sock, everything had been stolen by the Gestapo and secretly burned in a warehouse in the city. A little greengrocer had made his store out of our music room. Still to this day we are using furniture that we neither own nor is suitable for us, and likewise we are most sorely in need of clothes and linens. Our health has suffered badly: Eva has a horrible case of gastroptosis as a result of how terribly emaciated she has become and my heart has weakened significantly. Neither of us can fully recover due to the very serious lack of food. There is no meat, no fat, no potatoes, and that is to say nothing of coffee, tea or cigarettes!

In spite of it all we are almost happy. There is no more Gestapo and once again we can live with human dignity. And Eva can work all day in her beloved garden and plant vegetables. And I have become something of a "big shot". At the moment I have three important duties. Just as it was before 1933 I am the Professor ordinarius of the Dresden University of Technology, and I am the first chair of the Dresden's cultural association, and I am the head of the newly established and very important Dresden Community College. I am considered an expert in university matters by the government, I give many presentations in Dresden and further afield and occasionally speak on the radio, publish some writing, and was recently even the subject of film. From winter on it is likely that I will assume the position of a lecturer in my subject in Leipzig. Thanks to Eva's unflinching bravery my manuscripts have been saved from that terrible time, if my heart can keep going for another few years I should be able to get a few decent volumes out of them...

In any case, I am working as hard as I possibly can and am enjoying more success than I have ever had in my whole life. And because I accept all my current experiences and achievements as a completely unexpected and undeserved bit of good fortune, and because for years on end I was never more than the two fingers' breadth from death, I am able to live without any particular feelings of fear or solemnity weighing me down.

...and so I have just received a sign of life from my brother Georg, who is eighty-one years old and writes in completely fresh and lively script, while his grandson has already started to study medicine. Cross your fingers for me that I should make it to eighty-one, or at least seventy-one. I wish sincerely to help in pumping out Germany's cesspit, so that something honourable might be made of the country, and it

seems to me that I have been given the best chance of doing so. So next week I will be in Berlin again assisting the government with the university talks (regarding teacher training) and I intend to make my intention known. I should mention that Berlin is dreary and has been done frightful damage, and I always feel as though I am a ghost when I am there. None of the people I lived with there remain, most of them are dead and the rest are scattered throughout the world.

Please excuse the disjointed style. Eva is still sleeping. By the way, she is still composing some beautiful pieces, and in the next few days she will even be getting a piano, at least on a loan basis.

And so I wish you all the best, and hope to hear from you again soon.

Fondest regards, and from Eva too,

Your Victor.