

Maurice and His Dictionary: A True Story

Cary Fagan

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Cary Fagan's powerful graphic biography *Maurice and His Dictionary* is tender in its portrayal of World War II-era Europe.

Though capturing the terrifying plight of a Jewish family during WWII, the book also maintains the humor and joy that come from a strong, caring support system. In it, fourteen-year-old Maurice hopes to become a lawyer, even as his family escapes German persecution. The family travels from Belgium, across Europe, and ends up in an internment camp in Jamaica. While there, Maurice seeks help from the Jewish community to make up for his lost education, and teachers and professors are happy to help him out.

In Maurice's letter to Jamaica College, a local high school, he writes "I have learned the smallest act of kindness can make a huge difference." This line becomes the thesis of his story: no matter where his family escapes to, they are able to find people to help them, acting as a light to get through the horrors of the Holocaust. Picturesque moments stand out in this horrible period, and at both the school and in the internment camp, Maurice and his family overcome adversity.

The book's theatrical, exaggerated illustrations complement its lighthearted writing style. Its scene-to-scene transitions, and its methods of distinguishing between reality and fantasy, are illustrative and meaningful: whenever Maurice thinks of his life before the Holocaust, the panels are colored in a bright, oversaturated orange, in sharp contrast to the dark, shaded, claustrophobic scenes that depict the family in hiding.

A moving account in which a child's thirst for knowledge is a source of hope against a dismal, war-torn backdrop, *Maurice and His Dictionary* is an inspiring story.

GEORGE HAJJAR (November / December 2020)

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