

by Irene Diwiak
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Fiction

Tell Alex Not to Wait for Me

Sag Alex, er soll nicht auf mich warten

review

Tell Alex Not to Wait for Me is a fictionalised account of the real-life friendship that led to the founding of the White Rose resistance group during the Second World War. The novel is set primarily in Germany and based on historical events.

Medical students Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell meet when Hans observes Alex casually disappearing into the woods to get out of military training, and decides to follow suit. It is 1941, the Nazi regime is well established, and simply speaking your mind can be enough to land you in prison. Diwiak successfully conveys her protagonists' extreme caution and shows how fear is their constant companion, long before Hans and Alex decide to print their first protest leaflet.

The young men come from well-educated middle-class families and it is at Alex's house that Hans first experiences subtly non-conformist cultural gatherings. But even there, fear of denunciation sees Alex's parents clumsily shut down any conversation that threatens to address current political issues. We learn of Hans' teenage enthusiasm for the Hitler Youth and his role as group leader, his relationship with a male member of his group and his eventual arrest because of it. Meanwhile, Alex's Russian heritage becomes increasingly problematic as Germany goes to war with Russia and the two students are eventually drafted to serve in occupied Russian territory.

The story is told in the third person and reflects both Hans' and Alex's perspectives on events. The structure of the novel enhances our sense of the characters' development: Diwiak uses a series of flashbacks to provide insights into key episodes in their lives. We get to know the characters just as they gradually get to know and trust each other. Further key figures include Alex's childhood friend Christel and Hans' younger sister Sophie; during the latter half of the narrative we are also introduced to the other main figures who join the White Rose movement. Having started with an unnamed bystander's account of Hans and Sophie Scholl's arrest, the book comes full circle, ending on the night before their arrest.

Tell Alex Not to Wait for Me has heightened significance for a contemporary readership in the light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Against that background, this tale of opposition – of the need to speak out against the actions of an oppressive regime – has a renewed urgency.

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press quotes

> *How did two middle-class students and former members of the Hitler Youth, indoctrinated from an early age, come to found the White Rose anti-Nazi resistance movement? In her richly detailed account, Diwiak offers a fascinating insight into the lives of Hans Scholl and Alex Schmorell.*

Astrid Freuler, www.aftranslations.co.uk

about the author



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Irene Diwiak, born in in Graz, Austria, in 1991, has won several awards for her literary works and plays, and her 2017 debut Liebwies was shortlisted for the Austrian Book Prize (First Novel Award). Her second novel, Malvita, appeared in 2020.

Previous works: *Stahl und Glas*, edition taschenspiel (2014); *Die Isländerin*, Litag (2016); Liebwies, Deuticke (2017); *Malvita,* Zsolnay (2020); *Guilty Pleasures*, edition kürbis (2021).

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