

BY THE BEST-
SELLING



AUTHOR OF

FOCUS
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KURT

VONNEGUT

SLAUGHTER-

HOUSE-FIVE

“POIGNANT AND HILARIOUS,
THREADED WITH COMPASSION
AND, BEHIND EVERYTHING,
THE CATARACT OF A
THUNDERING MORAL STATEMENT.”

—The Boston Globe

ONE

All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names.

I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967. It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, and we made friends with a cab driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoners of war. His name was Gerhard Müller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was get-

ting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

He sent O'Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:

"I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will."

I like that very much: "If the accident will."

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.

But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either, when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons full grown.

I think of how useless the Dresden part of my memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about, and I am reminded of the famous limerick:

There was a young man from Stamboul,
Who soliloquized thus to his tool:
"You took all my wealth

And you ruined my health,
And now you won't *pee*, you old fool."

And I'm reminded, too, of the song that goes:

My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.
The people I meet when I walk down the street,
They say, "What's your name?"
And I say,
"My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin . . ."

And so on to infinity.

Over the years, people I've met have often asked me what I'm working on, and I've usually replied that the main thing was a book about Dresden.

I said that to Harrison Starr, the movie-maker, one time, and he raised his eyebrows and inquired, "Is it an anti-war book?"

"Yes," I said. "I guess."

"You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing anti-war books?"

"No. What *do* you say, Harrison Starr?"

"I say, 'Why don't you write an anti-*glacier* book instead?'"

What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too.

"VONNEGUT IS GEORGE ORWELL,
DR. CALIGARI AND
FLASH GORDON COMPOUNDED
INTO ONE WRITER... A ZANY BUT MORAL
MAD SCIENTIST." —Time

KURT VONNEGUT

is a master of contemporary American literature. He is the author of eighteen highly acclaimed books and dozens of short stories and essays. His black humor, satiric voice, and incomparable imagination first captured America's attention in *The Sirens of Titan* in 1959 and established him as "a true artist" with *Cat's Cradle* in 1963. He is, as Graham Greene has declared, "one of the best living American writers!"

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

is one of the world's great anti-war books. Centering on the infamous firebombing of Dresden, Billy Pilgrim's odyssey through time reflects the mythic journey of our own fractured lives as we search for meaning in what we are afraid to know.

"SPLENDID ART... A FUNNY BOOK AT WHICH
YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO LAUGH,
A SAD BOOK WITHOUT TEARS."

— Wilfrid Sheed, *Life*

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