

Dresden, Tennessee by Carolyn Slaughter. Faber and Faber 2007.

This is the first of Carolyn Slaughter's novels that I have read but, having done so I shall now look out some of her others.

Dresden, Tennessee is a mysterious and alluring title, and its two principal characters, Kurt and Hannah, share those qualities as well. At the start of the book it is clear that Kurt is suffering from severe psychological disturbance as he runs away from New York having believed that a bombing is about to take place there. He cannot remember anything about his life, though this changes as the story develops.

Travelling to the southern United States on an aircraft he gets talking with a fellow passenger, Hannah, and this is the start of a relationship during the course of which he rebuilds himself with her help and confronts his worst fears.

As the title hints, the original Dresden, scene of the Allied firebombing of 1945, plays a key part in the story, and as this unravels Kurt comes to know more of his family history and learn more about himself.

Although this is a short story at 225 pages it is profound, emotional and haunting. The depiction of the firebombing of Dresden particularly is one of the most powerful pieces of descriptive writing that I have ever read.

Carolyn Slaughter is clearly a novelist at the height of her powers.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh