

BOBBY

A historical graphic novel based on my father's accounts of growing up in Fascist Italy, his involvement in the Abyssinian Colonial War, and World War II.

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SYNOPSIS BY CHAPTERS

Quest for Water — Ethiopia, 1935. Bobby is ordered to advance his platoon towards enemy lines to secure life-saving water holes. Resistance by rebel fighters is to be expected. The troops arrive after one day of marching and as the soldiers are resting, Bobby reflects on how he got there.

Bobby is Born — A year into World War I, Bobby is born in Verona to Riccardo and Stella Zago. 3 months premature, he is in the care of a surrogate mother with whom they believe he stands the best chance for survival. Meanwhile the Italian army is forced to retreat after a devastating loss against the Austro-Hungarian empire and in 1918 the war comes to an end. Bobby is reunited with his parents and older brothers Nereo and Nello in his new home, a grand and luxurious hotel in the outskirts of Varese, where the Zagos take on the job of custodians.

Radio Days — The Italian economy falls into a deep slump. Mussolini (the Duce) grabs the opportunity to broadcast his message all over Italy. Listening in, Riccardo welcomes the Duce's message, soon becomes a member of the Fascist party and enlists 8-year old Bobby into the Fascist Youth movement but Bobby's fascination is with the radio and electronics.

Conformity — Endless arguments erupt between Riccardo and his older sons who outright refuse to subscribe to the new regime's politics and they immigrate to Egypt to escape the dictatorial state. At age 17, Bobby enlists in the army, where he quickly rises up the ranks. Meanwhile, Mussolini is pounding home a message of war to liberate and civilize Ethiopia. Days before Bobby is to be deployed to Africa, Riccardo is hunting in the Alps and tragically falls down a steep precipice and dies.

Battle for Water — At the water hole, Ethiopian rebels attack. Bobby flees toward a nearby mountain. Many of his troops follow him but hundreds of rebel fighters are lined up waiting for them. Completely outnumbered, Bobby and his troops prepare to fight a battle they likely will not survive but the Italian Air Force sweeps in to their rescue. Bobby is awarded for distinguished wartime conduct. That he was fleeing the enemy, not fighting them, remains his secret for years to come.

Bice — Honorably discharged from the army, Bobby enjoys freedom at home. He settles back in at the Liberty and takes on a job as a specialized mechanic. He meets Bice, a young dancer with whom he falls in love. In 1939 Hitler launches his Blitzkrieg on Europe. Bobby and the Italian troops are ordered back to the front lines with Germany and Japan, the Axis Alliance. He makes a heartfelt departure from his ill mother and Bice, whom he promises to marry upon his return and embarks on the invasion and occupation of Greece.

Changing of the Guards — Mussolini's propaganda machine loses its grip and he is replaced with Marshal Badoglio. Meanwhile Bobby is stationed on the outskirts of Athens along with the German troops where they maintain a stronghold against rebel enemy forces. That night Bobby is surprised to hear that Italy signed an armistice with the Allied forces. The Germans mobilize to arrest the Italians. The Italians initially resist but by sunrise, Bobby decides to surrender and spare his troops.

Voyage to the East — Stella still has no news from Bobby. Bobby's brother, Nello, manages to search military records for the whereabouts of his brother. He is shocked to find Bobby's name on a list of soldiers that were executed in Greece. Nello arranges to have Bobby buried in an empty coffin. After disarmament, Bobby and his troops are loaded onto trucks and driven away to a labor camp in East Prussia. Special units rescue Mussolini from his prison and he is taken to Germany. Bobby loses nearly half of his body weight and he lapses into a comatose state.

Nightmares — His feverish dreams take him back to Ethiopia and the Liberty Hotel. He sees his mother his brothers and father. A frail old man laying in the bed resembles Bobby. He awakes as his companions are holding him down while he is shaking uncontrollably.

Redemption — Almost two years pass and Bobby regains some strength. During an air raid Bobby is trapped under the rubble. Bobby regains consciousness to find the entire camp destroyed and the barracks burned to the ground. All German troops have fled.

Disoriented — Mussolini is executed along with his wife. The bodies are taken to Milan and hung for public display. Back in Prussia, Bobby and four other Italian soldiers walk in the forest, trying to avoid the advancing Soviets. Eventually they arrive in Prenzlau, where the Russians have set up a center for repatriation in a destroyed camp. A typhus epidemic breaks out and the Russians quarantine the entire camp. In April 1945, Bobby is given a travel pass. He arrives in Berlin on the day of the unconditional surrender of the German forces and the official end of World War II.

Long March Home — Throughout the long march home Bobby witnesses the worst devastation and misery. But joy for life is restored when he meets a string of ladies along the way. Bobby considers staying with each of them, but he is always reminded of the promise he made to Bice. After six long months of walking, he finally arrives in Varese in October of 1945. Wedding plans are set in motion soon after Bobby's reunion with Bice. Stella's health deteriorates, and days before the wedding she is in the last stage of her life.

One-Way Ticket — In the days following his mother's death, all of the pain and suffering Bobby had suppressed, the years of imprisonment, and the mistakes he made, resurface in him all at once and drown him in a deep depression. On the morning of the wedding, hundreds of guests assemble at the cathedral in Varese. Bobby gets dressed, takes a cab to the church, but then tells the driver to take him to the train station instead. With a one-way ticket he leaves Italy, and all of his past, behind.

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