



All for Nothing

Walter Kempowski

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Winter, January 1945. It is cold and dark, and the German army is retreating from the Russian advance. Germans are fleeing the occupied territories in their thousands, in cars and carts and on foot. But in a rural East Prussian manor house, the wealthy von Globig family tries to seal itself off from the world.

Peter von Globig is twelve, and feigns a cough to get out of his Hitler Youth duties, preferring to sledge behind the house and look at snowflakes through his microscope. His father Eberhard is stationed in Italy - a desk job safe from the front - and his bookish and musical mother Katharina has withdrawn into herself. Instead the house is run by a conservative, frugal aunt, helped by two Ukrainian maids and an energetic Pole. Protected by their privileged lifestyle from the deprivation and chaos around them, and caught in the grip of indecision, they make no preparations to leave, until Katharina's decision to harbour a stranger for the night begins their undoing.

Brilliantly evocative and atmospheric of the period, sympathetic yet painfully honest about the motivations of its characters, All for Nothing is a devastating portrait of the self-delusions, complicities and denials of the German people as the Third Reich comes to an end. Like deer caught in headlights, they stare into a gaping maw they sense will soon close over them.

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