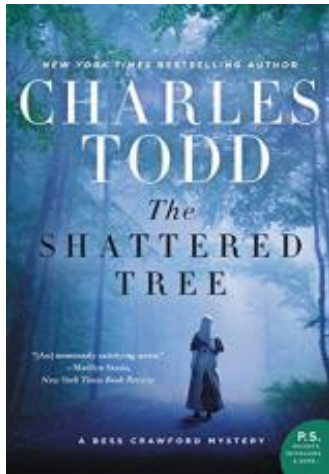


The Shattered Tree: A Bess Crawford Mystery

by Charles Todd



About the Book

World War I battlefield nurse Bess Crawford goes to dangerous lengths to investigate a wounded soldier's background --- and uncover his true loyalties --- in this thrilling and atmospheric entry in the bestselling 'vivid period mystery series' (*New York Times Book Review*).

At the foot of a tree shattered by shelling and gunfire, stretcher-bearers find an exhausted officer, shivering with cold and a loss of blood from several wounds. The soldier is brought to battlefield nurse Bess Crawford's aid station, where she stabilizes him and treats his injuries before he is sent to a rear hospital. The odd thing is, the officer isn't British --- he's French. But in a moment of anger and stress, he shouts at Bess in German.

When Bess reports the incident to Matron, her superior offers a ready explanation. The soldier is from Alsace-Lorraine, a province in the west where the tenuous border between France and Germany has continually shifted through history, most recently in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, won by the Germans. But is the wounded man Alsatian? And if he is, on which side of the war do his sympathies really lie?

Of course, Matron could be right, but Bess remains uneasy --- and unconvinced. If he was a French soldier, what was he doing so far from his own lines? and so close to where the Germans are putting up a fierce, last-ditch fight?

When the French officer disappears in Paris, it's up to Bess --- a soldier's daughter as well as a nurse --- to find out why, even at the risk of her own life.

Discussion Guide

1. What does THE SHATTERED TREE in the opening pages represent?

2. Discuss the role of the British Army and their medical services stationed in France during World War I. How do they treat non-British soldiers?
3. Why did the Scottish patient attack the French patient? What underlying factors may have played into this?
4. Historical reference is made to the Franco-Prussian War and the imperial territory of Alsace-Lorraine created by the German Empire. Discuss how this historical context plays into the depiction of France and Germany in WWI and within *THE SHATTERED TREE*.
5. *THE SHATTERED TREE* begins one month prior to the end of WWI. Describe elements in the narrative that portray the coming resolution to this conflict.
6. Describe Bess Crawford's relationship with Simon. He has been a pivotal character in this series. What role does he play in *THE SHATTERED TREE*, and what does he represent for Bess?
7. Discuss the impact of Bess' injury and how it changes the story. How does it make her better understand the role of a patient during wartime?
8. What role do Allied deserters play in this novel? What do you think is the appropriate justice for these people?
9. *THE SHATTERED TREE* of the title lies in No Man's Land. Discuss the significance and symbolism of this.
10. Who is Philippe Moreau, and in what way does he affect this story?
11. What is the relationship between Philippe Moreau and Jerome Karades? How is Bess involved with these two men?
12. Discuss the importance of the lacquer box that belongs to Sister Marie-Luc.
13. What is the history between Paul and Philippe Moreau, and how does it impact the action in *THE SHATTERED TREE*?
14. In a time of war, it's extremely difficult to maintain a sense of civility and justice. How does Bess play a role in assisting justice to triumph in the face of madness?

Author Bio

Charles Todd is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Inspector Ian Rutledge mysteries, the Bess Crawford mysteries, and two stand-alone novels. A mother-and-son writing team, Caroline passed away in August 2021. Charles lives in Florida.

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