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Alison Leslie Gold
FOUND AND LOST
Mittens, Miep, and shovelfuls of dirt
180pp. Notting Hill Editions. £14.99
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The Holocaust historian Alison Leslie Gold has made a career out of piecing together stories that might otherwise have been lost to history. *Anne Frank Remembered* rescued the story of Miep Gies, one of the Dutch citizens who hid Frank and safeguarded her diary after her death. In *Found and Lost*, a memoir composed of letters, Gold attempts to recover her own history, reckoning with the death not only of Gies, but also of her parents, lifelong friends and even a lover. Writing to a childhood companion, she comments, “My deathbed duties (aunt, mentor, father, role-model, lover, mother) seem to be at an end for the time being as all of the above have passed on”. Full of wry humour and quiet desolation, Gold’s voice is a large part of what makes this book so compelling.

Found and Lost meditates on the incomplete, unreliable and miscellaneous nature of letters. As the book’s “series of deaths” unfolds, we encounter poignant fragments of correspondence (Gold’s sister’s letters chronicling their mother’s deterioration, without any of her responses), unexpected connections (earnest enquiries from readers of *Anne Frank Remembered* along with Gold’s diligent answers) and letters that go unanswered (spam emails and a sycophantic literary agent floating the possibility of Gold’s writing “something like Patti Smith’s *Just Kids*”). This juxtaposition of quotidian detail with profound sorrow in *Found and Lost* is often very moving.

“‘My own life’ was never really my own at all”, Gold writes. “It was only ever a fabric of which, if I am the weft, then my loved-ones are the warp.” This sentiment appears at its most harrowing in the fond, intimate letters Gold writes to a deceased friend, Lily: “Who else to write to but you with this news”, she begins one of them, when she hears that Miep Gies has died. Though Gold is aware that nothing can prevent the pain of loss, her intimate address becomes as much a struggle against life’s contingency as a meditation on ageing and death.

Formal experimentation here sometimes comes at the expense of clarity. It is not always apparent how the book’s distinct forms (letter, autobiographical prose and disjointed poetic description) relate to one another and cohere. Nevertheless, in its attention to even the most minute emotions, this memoir captures the rough texture of lived experience in a way that often eludes more straightforward autobiography.

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