MANN'S REVENGE

A Novel
By
Josh Becker

Dedicated to
my dear friend,
James Rose,
in gratitude for his
inspiration and knowledge

To the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851

Part One
1918-1929

Chapter One
January, 1918

Karl Mann sat by himself in the icy, frozen mud at the bottom of a trench. His fellow soldiers, with whom he had gone through training, and with whom he'd served in the army for the past seven months, were all huddled together around a machine gun emplacement, away from Karl. Karl was the outcast. Whenever the fighting began he would always be right there, but he never joined in—he simply would not kill another human being, no matter what the cause and no matter what he had been ordered to do. He'd made up his mind and that was all there was to it. Luckily, they'd never been in the thick of battle before—until now.

Karl's squad of the 11th Bavarian Infantry was now filling a front-line trench. Beyond that was no-man's land, then the enemy. There was nowhere else to go but back and his squad all knew it. So Karl sat alone, his knees drawn up to his chest under his woolen coat, his head pulled down, his steel helmet resting on his shoulders. His rifle sat beside him: clean,

oiled and loaded. The question was, would he ever use it? This was not in question to Karl, however, because he knew he never would.

Perhaps it could all be traced back to the period in his childhood when he and his best friend, Gebhard, had been out at a swamp shooting frogs with Gebhard's father's .22-caliber rifle. They were ten years old and were having great fun. Every now and then they'd hit a frog just right and it would go flying up into the air, then come splashing down in the swamp, dead. Occasionally they'd find a turtle sunning itself on a log and shoot it, too.

One day, Gebhard had left the rifle and shells at Karl's house, and, with nothing better to do, Karl went out shooting. Since he and Gebhard had been out at the swamp every day for the past three weeks they had managed to eliminate most of the frog population, or at least a great deal of it. So Karl sat by himself with rifle resting on his lap, staring out across the green, murky water. Not a single frog was popping up its little green head above the surface of the water today, just the occasional dragonfly fluttering by, and there was no way to shoot one of those because they

were too small and too fast to hit. Maybe the frogs were just staying away from this part of the swamp, the section that he and Gebhard had hunted so unmercifully. Karl rose to his feet, shaded his eyes against the sun's glare, attempting to see way out into the swamp.

Just then, on a branch two feet in front of Karl's face, a cute little sparrow landed. Karl froze, the rifle in his hands, his finger on the trigger. Holding his breath, he silently swung the barrel of the rifle around, aimed it point-blank at the sparrow and fired. The .22-caliber bullet hit the bird dead-on. It exploded in a puff of feathers, then came splashing down into the water directly in front of him. Half its body was gone, blood spilling out into the water around the remainder of the sparrow's body, which was flopping around spasmodically.

Karl reared back in revulsion, thinking, how could I have done this to such a cute little bird? It continued to jerk and splash with its one functioning wing while emitting a tiny, desperate, pathetic chirping. Karl quickly snapped back the bolt of the rifle, the spent shell sailing onto the shore, inserted a new shell, cocked it, aimed and shot the flailing bird. Now

its entire bottom half was blown off, but the head and the single wing persisted staying afloat, still flailing and chirping in the most hopeless way possible. Reloading again, he leaned forward, aimed carefully, and this time blasted the sparrow's head off. The concussion caused it to disappear beneath the murky surface of the water, but a moment later the dead remains of the bird resurfaced. Karl shot it again and again in a futile attempt to make it go away, but it wouldn't, and the feathers and guts kept floating back to the surface.

Utterly despondent, Karl slowly walked home. From there on out he no longer accompanied Gebhard on any more frog and turtle hunts. And that was that.

It wasn't as though the incident gave him nightmares or haunted him, and he did continue to play with guns, although he never owned one (nor did his father), but it certainly stayed with him and made a serious impression on him. He consciously didn't realize it, but he had now decided to never kill another helpless animal, not if he could possibly help it.

So, sitting off by himself in a frozen muddy trench in the front lines of France during World War I, Karl thought about three weeks earlier, a few days before New Year's, when he and his squad were bivouacked in an empty barn about a half mile from the front. Suddenly, there was shooting, and bullets began ripping through the sides of the barn. Everyone dove to the straw-covered floor, then crawled over to the windows and door. Several more shots tore through the wooden walls, then all of the guys began firing back... except Karl. He just lay there, his face resting on the stock of his Mauser rifle, the sights all lined up aiming at the muzzle flashes of the enemy weapons firing at him, but he never pulled the trigger.

No one noticed since they were extremely caught up in the moment. His friend, Albert Kemmer, stood up beside Karl, leaned out the window, and began rapidly firing his rifle, working the bolt, firing over and over again. And then *Wham!*—a bullet hit him directly in the forehead. Albert spun around backward, collapsing on his face in the straw. A puddle of

blood formed under his motionless head, a wheezing death rattle escaped his open mouth, a look of surprise in his dead, glassy eyes.

At that moment Karl did not vomit or scream or run; he simply decided that he would never kill another human being under any circumstances for as long as he lived. He didn't swear it to God or on his mother's grave or anything of the sort. That was just the way it was and there was nothing he could do about it. How he would stick to this resolution while being a soldier at the battlefront of a World War he didn't pretend to know. Nor would he desert, either; he'd just stick it out and pretend.

Karl's squad had tracked a group of enemy soldiers through the woods, finally capturing them before any injury was inflicted. All of his buddies, including Gebhard, were exhilarated by the chase, though they were all mildly disappointed that they hadn't been allowed to kill any of them. Each soldier in the squad told of his experiences in the capture as though none of the other soldiers had even been there.

By the next morning at chow, when many of the stories were being retold for the fourth and fifth time, Gebhard noticed his friend, Karl, wasn't talking and hadn't really said anything since the mission the previous day.

With his tin of beans and sausage and a cup of coffee, Gebhard found Karl eating alone, seated on the running board of a truck. The other guys were about a hundred yards away near some other company's fire. Gebhard sat down next to Karl. They were both nineteen years old and from the same small town of Landshut, forty miles northeast of Munich, situated on the Isar River, a tributary of the Danube. Karl's father was the town's only doctor and Gebhard's father was the headmaster at the high school they both attended. When they graduated in June of 1917, they had no other choice but to join the army. The war had been raging on for three bloody years, and Germany was clearly losing momentum on the Western Front in France.

During their senior year of high school, Gebhard's father had introduced army drill instruction into the curriculum to prepare the male students for their upcoming military service. There were all sorts of war

committees (most of which Gebhard's father had formed and made himself chairman of) and Karl's father was a member of several, even if he had initially been against going to war. But now Germany's honor was at stake and its elders demanded that the young men fight for it. No one had asked them, and to act any other way was not only cowardly, but treasonous.

And so they had trained in school, and when they graduated they were immediately put into a reserve unit. That's where Karl and Gebhard had first buddied up with Volker Jannings, a factory worker from Dresden, Jan Froese, a cobbler's apprentice from Schleissheim, and Albert Kemmer, a sixteen-year-old high school student from Munich who had lied about his age to join the army. And now Albert was dead.

Karl and Gebhard sat on the truck's running board, hungrily wolfing down their beans and sausage before it got cold, their cups of coffee squeezed between their legs under their coats so that it would still be warm after the food was gone.

"It's too bad about Albert," Gebhard said, scraping his tin plate with an oversized spoon.

"Yeah," Karl agreed. "I guess he got too excited and wanted to get a better shot. That's why he stood up in the window."

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

Gebhard shrugged. "You never fired a shot."

"There was nothing to shoot at, I never saw a target."

"None of us did."

Karl sipped his now lukewarm coffee. "Then you were just wasting ammunition. There isn't much of it left, in case you haven't heard. We have been ordered to use it sparingly."

Gebhard nodded, letting the subject drop. Karl was right, there wasn't a whole lot of ammunition left, nor had there been a clear target, and they had been ordered to ration what they had, but still...

Karl's squad was moved up to the rear of the trenches at the front line where the quality of life diminished even more. Now they had to sleep in the bone-chilling, frozen mud and run supplies forward for the

quartermaster. Karl didn't mind a bit. As long as they were busy and didn't have to fight, it was fine with him.

A week later their squad was chosen for a patrol to check the barbed wire north of the trenches. When it was dark, Karl, Gebhard, Jan and Volker crawled up the line making sure there were no holes in the wire. If there were holes, they had to repair them with piano wire and wire cutters.

It got progressively darker the further they crawled up the Siegfried Line (or the Hindenburg Line, as the Allies referred to it).

Karl had still not reconciled his approach to nonaggression. All he knew was that he wasn't going to kill anybody and if that meant that someone was going to kill him, then God simply worked in mysterious ways. Just in case, however, he said a short little homemade prayer that went, "God please give me a break," that he repeated like a chant as his arms and legs slid forward through the cold snowy grass.

Karl went first, then Gebhard, Volker and Jan. This was the way it always was because Karl was the most cautious—and the biggest. He was 180 pounds, six feet tall, broad-chested, solid and strong, with thin, white-

blond hair that covered his arms and the backs of his hands. Karl never really felt like a big person, although he'd always been adept at wrestling and boxing (and had been undefeated in five round-robin boxing matches during training). When it came to fighting, everyone trusted the big guys since they were obviously more experienced at it. When this clique formed, Karl was naturally made the leader. And he naturally accepted it, as he always had before. Since the battle at the barn, where Karl thought that no one had noticed he wasn't firing, when in fact everyone had noticed, Karl's leadership abilities had come into question.

As Karl reached the top of a small knoll he could see in the thicket below a group of five enemy soldiers cutting through the wire. Quickly lowering himself beneath the edge of the knoll, Karl held up his hand for the other guys to stop, then put his finger to his lips indicating silence. Karl slid down beside Gebhard.

"There are five of them down there cutting the wire," whispered Karl.

The other two crowded up looking tense.

"What'll we do?" Jan asked Karl.

Karl scanned the three eager faces staring back at him. That was it. There was no avoiding the situation now and it didn't appear that God was going to intervene and give him that break he'd been asking for.

"Let's kill them," Karl flatly stated.

That was what they wanted to hear, so they all crawled to the top of the hill.

The enemy soldiers had soot smeared on their faces, packs on their backs, wire cutters in hand, and were obviously on a sabotage mission. Karl and the others were in position, their rifles sighted in on the shadowy figures below them. They all waited for Karl to make the first move. Pulling in a deep breath, Karl fired, his bullet whizzing two feet over the Allied commando's heads. A half second later the other three Germans opened fire, Gebhard thoroughly aware of what his friend beside him was doing. A minute later they stopped firing, all of them having emptied their six-shot clips.

"All right!" Jan exclaimed exuberantly.

"That'll show those bastards not to cut our wire!" declared Volker.

"Yeah," Gebhard agreed, not looking at Karl as he released the clip from his rifle.

"Let's reload and get the hell out of here," Karl stated flatly.

From Karl's tone and Gebhard's expression the other two picked up that something was wrong and stopped smiling.

Gebhard turned back to Karl. "Shouldn't we check to see if any of them are wounded?"

"You know what the policy is, no wounded prisoners," Karl said, staring into the dark thicket. "Go do it."

"Why don't you?" Gebhard replied defiantly.

"Because," Karl said, "I don't want to shoot anyone point-blank."

"You don't want to shoot anyone at all, do you?" Gebhard asked.

Volker and Jan looked from one best friend's face to the other.

The moment hung heavily until Karl finally sighed and shook his head. "No."

Gebhard was disgusted. “Of all the people I’ve ever known, Karl, I never thought you would turn out to be a coward.”

Karl looked deep into the eyes of his three friends and spoke plainly, without fear. “If to not kill is to be a coward; then I’m a coward.”

Gebhard wasn’t listening. He ran off without looking back. Volker and Jan looked at each other, then they too ran off.

Karl watched them go down the hill. A moment later there was the crack of rifle fire, accompanied by muzzle flashes. Karl was on the verge of tears. Five dead men, what was the point?

I don’t care what happens, he thought. I didn’t kill any of those men.

This was scant consolation as he turned away in utter revulsion and started down the hill.

Word spread that Karl was a coward and everyone stopped talking to him. He was an outcast, a leper, a pariah; something he had never experienced before. Previously, he had always gained immediate acceptance, and had generally been the leader. It was more than likely that

most of the folks in Landshut would describe Karl as one of the friendliest, kindest, most congenial people they knew, as well as being a natural-born leader.

Unfortunately, war had nothing to do with being kind or congenial; you were either a killer, you were a coward, or you were dead. Whether or not the other soldiers were actually killers, they wanted it plainly understood that that was what they were, killers, and therefore survivors. Since Karl had made it clear that he was not a killer, it was now commonly understood that he was dead—or soon would be—and nobody wanted to buddy up with a dead man.

Now guys he didn't even know looked at him strangely and bumped and pushed him as they went by in the trench or the chow line. Karl had never been the type to rise to this kind of bait in the first place and he didn't begin now. He just retreated into his own cocoon of loneliness and despair.

He never once honestly questioned the validity of his stance. Killing was wrong and everyone knew it; they simply acted like he was a coward

so they could hate him for another reason instead of the one at issue. Since they had killed and knew it was wrong, their guilt was causing them to despise him. The inequity of it all shocked and hurt Karl more deeply than anything ever had.

So Karl was alone, crouched in the icy mud at the bottom of a trench, his former buddies a short distance away huddled around a machine gun emplacement. Karl lit one of the twenty cigarettes he had been issued the day before and inhaled deeply. He hadn't smoked before enlisting, probably most of them hadn't. It was a dirty habit, but here at the front line it certainly was a comfort. Cupping the cigarette in his hands he tried to absorb some warmth. Then he heard Gebhard's laugh momentarily cut through the battlefront din. Karl liked the intensity of Gebhard's laugh; it was obstinately loud, possibly in retaliation to his mother's and father's humorless strictness. Karl had always avoided going to his friend's house because the atmosphere was so unfriendly. Since Karl's mother had died five years before, his father no longer laughed as much as he used to, but

he still laughed pretty often. If they ever went to either of their houses after school it was always Karl's. It wasn't as if he didn't get along with Gebhard's parents—he did—he just didn't enjoy their company.

A soldier with a leather sack over his shoulder stepped up in front of Karl with a pile of letters in his gloved hand.

"Private Karl Mann?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes," Karl said, holding out his hand, "that's me."

The soldier handed him a letter and moved on. Well, this was an unexpected surprise. He hadn't received a letter since he'd been moved up to the front two weeks before. Eagerly, he tore open the flap of the envelope and removed his father's achingly short letter.

"Dear Karl,

I hope this letter finds you well and that you are not having too bad a time of it in France. If only you'd been sent to the Eastern Front you might well be coming home soon. The newspapers say that the Tsar's government is collapsing, that the Bolsheviks will soon take over, and they have vowed to not continue the fight.

We are all getting along fine here, although food and fuel grow more scarce every day. Do you remember Mrs. Hagelstein? The rather heavyset lady from the bakery. Well, she just had triplets, the first that I've ever delivered. All of them fine, healthy girls. The local scandal right now is about your friend Gebhard's old girlfriend, Helga Kleinschmidt. Apparently, Gebhard's younger brother saw her in a restaurant in Munich with some seedy-looking characters. The number of men has varied from story to story. At any rate, the brother seemingly wrote Helga a letter demanding back every gift that Gebhard had ever given her, then began slandering her name all over town calling her the most hideous names, which I'm sure aren't true. I've known Helga since she was born and will not believe such awful things. Since you and Gebhard are such good friends I thought I should let you know and you can tell him. That's all for now, I'll write again soon.

Your loving father,

Dr. Alfred Mann"

Karl reread the line about him and Gebhard being such good friends, then felt sad all over again. Suddenly, Gebhard's voice bellowed out.

"Goddamn that stupid little idiot!"

Without being able to see him, Karl knew that Gebhard had just read the same information in his letter from home. Now Karl felt bad for Gebhard, too. How could his brother do such a thing? And what did "seedy-looking characters" mean?

Just then a bombardment began. American twelve-inch howitzer shells came screaming in all over the place. Karl rolled onto his side, curling himself into a ball, grabbing his helmet and holding it down tightly over his head. The earth trembled as dirt cascaded down on top of him. One explosion, then another, then another, all very close by. He couldn't think, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't even scream. He just clenched his teeth and shut his eyes as tight as he could . . .

Chapter Two

April, 1918

. . . Karl's eyes burst open and were filled with bright white light. Blinking rapidly, his eyes cleared and he realized that he was in a hospital; a huge ward with a hundred patients filled with a vast current of sound: moaning, screaming, talking, scraping, all intermingling up at the high ceiling.

He tried to sit up, but felt severely stiff and achy. How long have I been here? he wondered. He rubbed his face and found more whiskers than he had ever let grow there before. By the feel of his long blond beard he estimated that he must have been unconscious for at least two weeks. Then he panicked. He felt around his whole body checking to see if all the parts were there. When he got to his right thigh he found it bandaged and hurting like hell. Thank God they hadn't taken off his leg. Amputation was the most common cure for a wounded limb at that time.

The patients on either side of him watched Karl's process of self-discovery and began to laugh. Karl turned to the patient on his right.

"Hi," he hissed through cracked lips and a parched throat.

"Well," the wounded man declared, "the little coward has come back to life."

This brought on a few hoots and chuckles.

Karl dropped back on the bed with a deep sigh as he clearly recalled the bombardment and the whole world shaking around him. He thanked God he was alive. On the other hand, the moniker "coward" had followed him from the battlefield to the hospital like a lost dog. Would it now follow him all the days of his life, everywhere he went?

As Karl made his way through the little train depot in Landshut, his limp nearly gone, he watched several other newly-released wounded soldiers reuniting with their families. He had gone to school with all of them. His father hadn't arrived yet. One of the soldiers pointed at Karl, which caused his whole family to turn and look. After a brief moment they all stopped staring at him, turned and left the station. As they stepped out, Karl's father stepped in.

Dr. Alfred Mann was a thin, tall, white-haired widower of fifty, with a long, broken nose and white, bushy eyebrows. Karl and his father both saw each other at the same moment and met smiling at the front door. Karl dropped his duffel bag and he and his father hugged tightly.

"Come," his father said, putting his arm around Karl's shoulders, "let's go home."

By the time they sat down to the dinner Dr. Mann had prepared, Karl was nearly in a panic again. It appeared that either his father was avoiding the topic, something his son had never seen him do before, or he hadn't heard yet, which was unlikely since he was the only doctor in town, knew everybody, and thus was privy to everyone's secrets and gossip. Alfred Mann was the most direct person that Karl had ever met (with the possible exception of his drill instructor, Sergeant Kroger). At this point Karl was waiting for his father to bring it up and then look at him hatefully just like everybody else. It would be the final straw that would break his back and Karl was just waiting for it to happen. The world had taught him one thing,

then everyone ganged up on him for believing it. This wickedness was surely too great to spare him anything at this point.

Dr. Mann ladled soup into a bowl and set it before his son, then filled one for himself. He put his hands together, closed his eyes and mouthed a prayer to himself, just as he had always done before supper. He looked at his apprehensive child and smiled.

"You are not a coward, Karl. You're a kind, honest, fair man, exactly as your mother and I brought you up to be. I'm very proud of you. You stood up for something that was truly right when everyone in the whole world was against you. Never be ashamed."

A long pent-up breath that had been decaying at the bottom of Karl's soul now welled up and came out. He shuddered as it passed.

"Thank God."

His father nodded. "And you're alive, too, thank God for that."

"Yes," Karl said, "I already have."

"Good," stated the doctor ending the whole subject. "Let's eat dinner."

Karl went to work for his father in his medical office, which was located on the first floor of their house, while he anxiously awaited word from the admissions office of the Munich Medical Academy. Due to the war, paperwork was taking quite a long time to process. Karl hoped to begin medical school in a year, giving him time to become familiar with many different medical procedures in his father's office. Since Dr. Alfred Mann was the only physician in Landshut, from 7:00 A.M. until 6:00 P.M., often later, patients filled the waiting room. The constant influx of ailing people allowed Karl to see a vast array of maladies and treatments every day. At first a few people objected to his son observing and assisting. In his blunt direct manner the doctor would tell them that if they didn't like the way he ran his practice they could go elsewhere (the nearest other doctor being twenty miles away), and the complaints soon ceased.

Karl was one of the very few men in town between the ages of eighteen and forty. The others were either unfit for duty, physically or mentally, or had already returned from the war, often missing limbs. Thus,

Karl was as visible as a sore thumb, even if he did now have a war wound that caused him to limp. He was ostracized by one and all, so he simply stopped going out. After all the patients had been treated and had left for the day, and after Karl and his father had eaten dinner, Karl would sit in the living room smoking cigarettes and reading his father's medical books until bedtime. The only times he went out were when he accompanied his father on house calls, when he went shopping, or when he and his father went to church on Sunday. Alfred was not happy about his son's situation, occasionally urging him to at least *try* to socialize, but all of his entreaties fell upon deaf ears.

"The longer you stay hidden," said his father, "the longer you'll propagate this attitude people have about you."

"I really don't care," Karl replied, not looking up from his reading.

Alfred knew that his son was not being truthful, but didn't force the issue.

That Sunday after church, as Karl and Alfred filed past Father Grunner to shake his hand and compliment him on his sermon, Father Grunner hung onto Karl's hand for an extra second and said, "Please stay for a minute, Karl, I'd like to talk with you."

When everyone was gone, including Dr. Mann, Father Grunner and Karl sat down on a bright white wooden bench reposing serenely beneath a big old maple tree in front of the 300-year-old church.

"How are you?" the minister asked.

"I'm fine, Father," Karl replied with a smile. "How are you?"

"Concerned about you, Karl. Why haven't you come to talk to me?"

"There's nothing to talk about. I'm fine."

"Karl," said Father Grunner knowingly, "I see what you're going through and I want you to know that I admire the way you've handled yourself. I have never had my faith put to such a difficult test and I don't know that I would have come through as well as you have. But now it's time to move on and continue living your life."

"I am living my life," Karl said, still smiling. "Honestly, I'm fine."

Father Grunner nodded, “I know, that’s why I would like you to help me a little bit.”

“What?” Karl asked suspiciously.

Father Grunner chuckled. “Don’t look so shocked, I’m not asking for a full-time commitment, or even part-time . There is going to be a dance at the town hall this Friday and I’d like you to help with the arrangements.”

Karl looked confused. “A dance? But I don’t even want to go.”

“I know you don’t, and you don’t have to go if you’d rather not, but please help me set it up, would you?”

“Well, of course,” Karl shrugged indifferently. “I’d be happy to.”

“Good,” Father Grunner proclaimed clapping his hands together. “I’ll see you about 7:30 this evening at the town hall. Thank you, Karl, you’re being a great help to me.” He got up and strode back into the church.

“Great,” Karl muttered, “I don’t even like to dance.” He rubbed his wounded leg. “And I’m not sure I even can anymore.”

Later that day, as Karl strolled languidly through town, he arrived at the bridge over the Isar River and stopped. He stared down into the swirling murky water and thought, why won't everyone just leave me alone? All I want to do is pursue my interests and not bother or harm anyone, and everything keeps conspiring to hold me down. He remembered a quote he had once read somewhere, "Just give me a place to stand and I'll conquer the world." He shook his head morosely and thought, they won't even give me a place to stand.

"Hello, Karl," said a young man with thick glasses and an owlish look. He carried an armload of books as he approached.

It was an old school chum, Walter Hossbach, and Karl was automatically on guard. "Hello, Walter."

Walter stopped, leaning his heavy load on the bridge's railing. "Thinking of jumping in?"

"No," retorted Karl defensively.

"I didn't say you were, but you were sure staring into the water pretty hard. I haven't seen you since you got back. I heard you were wounded."

"I'm all right."

"I guess so. Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

Karl was confused. Most people hadn't even wanted to talk to him since he'd returned, let alone ask him a personal question.

"Okay," he agreed slowly.

Walter seemed incredibly eager. "Have you read Karl Marx?"

Karl started to laugh. "That's a personal question?"

"Yeah. Have you?"

"Actually, no. Why, are you a communist?"

Walter smiled. "Actually, yes."

"That's a shame," grinned Karl. "I'll bet you don't have many comrades here in town."

"Very true. Communism doesn't have much of a foothold here in Landshut. Nor, for that matter, does anything else except apathy and fear

of the unknown. So," Walter straightened up, "you are our town's big disgrace."

Karl knew it was coming and here it was. His guard immediately shot back up. "And what if I am?"

"Small potatoes," Walter stated. "I know that with only half an effort I can become *twice* the disgrace you are. I've been considering assassinating von Hindenburg. They'd forget you ever existed, I can tell you that."

Karl smiled again. "Do it, I've had enough notoriety. So, Walter Hossbach—school troublemaker—why aren't you fighting in the war?"

"Well, you see," said Walter pointing to his glasses. "I'm blind in my right eye . . . and I just can't see well out of my left. Luckily, my job doesn't call for good vision."

"What do you do?"

"I edit the newspaper."

"I'll have to start reading it," Karl chuckled.

"As yet," Walter said, "Mr. Jarczewsky, the publisher, won't allow me to include any of my own writing in the publication. He doesn't want

to offend anyone, and since God never blessed him with a worthwhile opinion on anything, he has succeeded at that rather formidably. Well, I must be off."

"It was nice talking to you," Karl said.

"And you," Walter replied, hefting his books and moving on. "I'll see you around."

"What did Father Grunner want?" Dr. Mann asked at dinner.

"He wants me to help arrange a dance at the town hall this Friday. He wants me to come by the church tonight." Karl lowered his fork and narrowed his eyes. "Did you talk to him?"

"Father Grunner is a friend of mine, I talk to him quite often."

"About me?"

"Frequently."

Karl nodded. "So what, may I ask, is he up to?"

"I believe," said his father with a slight grin, "that he's putting together a dance and desires your help."

"Well, thank you for clarifying everything for me."

His father returned to eating. "My pleasure. Please pass the potatoes."

The Landshut town hall was an enormous stone building erected in 1642. At that time the town was the center of education of Bavaria with a university located there. Soon after the town hall was completed the university was moved to Munich, and the tiny town of Landshut, with a population of ten thousand people, was left with a school building large enough for five thousand students, and a town hall big enough for a major city.

Karl had always disliked going to the town hall. It made him feel like a small child when his mother used to bring him there for town and church events. Everything was scaled for giants so even now that he was an adult he still felt little. Father Grunner met him on the massive front steps wearing a peculiar smirk.

"Karl, it's so nice to see you."

Karl looked mildly confused. “But you were expecting me, weren’t you?”

“Why yes, of course. I’ve already dealt with most of the details. All you’ll really need to do is set things up and make sure it all looks nice.” Father Grunner started down the steps.

Karl scratched the side of his head. “Aren’t you going to supervise?”

“I have matters to attend to at the church. There’s someone already at work inside, they’ll show you what needs to be done.” As Father Grunner crossed the cobblestone street, Karl watched him go. With a shrug, he went inside.

A few of the heavy wooden benches had been moved aside and a long table was set up with rows of glasses and an empty punch bowl. Karl scanned the immense dim room for a sign of life, but couldn’t see anyone. The oppressive vast emptiness of the room was beginning to weigh down on him. He was feeling smaller and younger by the second.

“How did I get myself into this?” he asked himself out loud, his voice sounding very hollow.

"Me, too?" asked a voice behind him.

Karl turned and there stood an extremely attractive, slim, raven-haired, green-eyed young lady, attired in a simple gray dress, who was presently holding a tray of glasses. As she stepped closer they both immediately recognized each other.

"Karl?" she asked in amazement.

He smiled at the joy of being recognized by someone he obviously knew (who also happened to be a pretty girl), then blushed deeply because he couldn't recall her name. In lieu of anything better, he said, "Here, let me take that," and took the tray of glasses.

"You don't remember me, do you?"

"Yes I do, I just don't remember your name," he said with his back to her as he set the tray down on the table.

"I'm Helga. Helga Kleinschmidt. Gebhard and I were engaged for a short time." This last part was added rather dryly.

Karl lit up. “Of course. Helga, how are you?” How have you been?”

They both sat down on one of the long, hard, wooden benches.

Abruptly, her smile vanished and she looked down at the floor. “I’m all right, how are you?”

And now Karl’s smile faded and he too looked down at the stone floor. “All right.” They both became silent and introspective.

Slowly, they both looked back up at each other, started to speak, then stopped. They each peered into each other’s eyes, hoping to find something there that was lacking in everyone else’s.

Karl said, “Actually, uh . . .” but couldn’t find the words to continue.

Helga nodded sympathetically. “I know, Karl. At least, I know what I’ve heard.” She looked away. “I’m sure you’ve heard about me, too. Do you believe it?”

“No,” Karl stated. “Never. I’ve known Gebhard and his brother Heinrich my whole life. Heinrich never grew up. He’s always been a nasty, malicious kid.”

"So is Gebhard," she added bitterly. "I never believed what they were saying about you, either, Karl."

Karl looked down at the floor, tightly clasping his hands together. "Except what they're saying about me *is* true."

Helga reached over and touched Karl's white-knuckled hands. "It's not true. You're not a coward and never were. I know that. We've never really been friends, Karl, but I have known you since we were little and what they're saying is just not true."

Karl continued to stare down, a frown on his lips. Helga grasped his hands a little more firmly and he looked up with an expression of deep pain. She felt like crying for him, but instead smiled. "You don't think Father Grunner might have had ulterior motives in getting you and I to 'arrange' this dance, do you?"

A smile managed to creep through Karl's despair. "Oh no. He would just say that God works in mysterious ways."

"Of course. And sometimes Father Grunner helps God's mysterious ways move along."

They both laughed, relieving the heaviness that had weighed them both down a moment before. “Uh . . .” Karl began, clearing his throat.

“Yes?”

“Well, um . . . were you planning on going to this dance?”

Helga shook her head. “No. Who would take me? I’m a fallen woman.”

Karl looked back down at his clasped hands. “Could I take you?”

“I’m sure we’d cause a scandal.”

“A scandal with Father Grunner’s blessing,” smiled Karl, feeling weak. Why hadn’t he ever noticed Helga before? She was so pretty, and bright. Suddenly his whole life depended on this moment. Beyond Father Grunner’s matchmaking, he wasn’t sure if Helga Kleinschmidt cared for him at all. Her expression was so odd that he couldn’t tell one way or the other. Now she looked away.

“You’ve always been oblivious of me, Karl. You never knew I existed, but I always knew that you did. I remember seeing you right here,” she waved her hand at the vast room. “You and Gebhard were lighting

matches out back and Father Grunner caught you. He dragged you both in by your ears in front of everybody. We all laughed at you." Karl smiled wistfully at his past mischief, turning away in embarrassment. Helga could see his pink scalp through his thin blond hair. She waited until he turned back. "I've always liked you, Karl. Ever since we were little. You were always taller than the other boys and so confident. That's why I went out with Gebhard, because he was your best friend."

"*Was*," Karl added dryly. After a moment of silence he swallowed deeply. "You've always liked me? Really?"

Helga nodded. They saw their muted reflections in each other's eyes. Now Karl reached out and touched her hands. They were very soft, like a kitten's fur.

"Helga?"

"Yes, Karl."

"Where do you live?"

Helga began to laugh. "About ten houses away from you."

"Really? That close?"

"Yes. That close."

Karl and Helga did go to the dance that Friday night, to Father Grunner's and Dr. Mann's delight. They received a fair amount of long looks, but since neither Gebhard nor his brother Heinrich were there, it caused no scandal. It made no difference to them one way or the other—they were both far too consumed with each other. And having grown up in the same small town their entire lives, yet never really having spoken before, gave them innumerable topics to discuss.

By the end of the next week they were seeing each other every day. Karl began having dinner with the Kleinschmidts with more and more regularity, mostly due to Helga, of course, but partially due to the urgings of her father. Mr. Kleinschmidt had been blessed with five daughters, Helga being the eldest, and he desperately enjoyed the company of another male. Had it been up to Helga they would have dined every night at Karl's house with his father. She thought Dr. Mann was a far superior cook to her mother (who had been born in Hungary and considered a lot of paprika

essential to every dish) and she and the doctor got along wonderfully (not to mention that Dr. Mann had delivered her). Alfred loved having a woman in the house again and spoke glowingly of Helga to Karl many times during the day as they worked together. Karl felt like he was being pushed into marriage, but didn't complain. He and Helga were happy; as happy as they'd ever been.

And then Gebhard's brother Heinrich began slandering Helga again. He repeated his trumped-up story, which Helga had emphatically denied—and Karl absolutely believed her—of Helga's alleged "whoring" in Munich, and now making new comments regarding the appropriateness of her falling in love with a coward. Since Heinrich was so insidious in his repetition, most of the town was not only repeating the story, they were accepting it as fact. As the assistant in the office of the town's sole doctor, Karl was in the unenviable position of hearing these libelous rumors repeated about the woman he loved several times a day.

After this had been going on for a week, Mr. Kleinschmidt left his home for work promptly at 6:00 A.M. and found "Whore" painted across

his front door in large white letters. Karl heard about it an hour later when he opened their door to let in the day's first patients. Immediately growing furious, Karl stormed outside heading directly to Heinrich's house. As he turned on to Heinrich's street (Gebhard's street in his mind), there came the culprit himself, books in hand, on his way to school. He saw Karl and halted, a belligerent tilt to his head. Eyes blazing and his jaw clamped firmly shut, Karl strode right up to Heinrich and stuck his finger in his face. Heinrich was a half a foot shorter, fifty pounds lighter, two years younger, and had a double chin, beady little eyes, and rimless pince-nez glasses.

"Let me tell you something," Karl declared, concertedly keeping his anger in check. "Your one-man crusade against Helga stops right now! The fact that you have no idea what you're talking about is beside the point. You're acting stupid and hateful toward someone I care about and I will not allow it to continue for one more minute! Do you hear me?"

Heinrich's disdainful belligerent expression did not alter one bit, nor did he show the slightest sign of fear.

"And what are you going to do about it? You couldn't even fight in the war. My brother wrote to me all about it. You were the chicken of the whole company. So what are you going to do now, chicken?"

Karl's rage was like a broiling hot balloon in his chest, causing him to choke. Every code of honor demanded that he break this vile little creature in half, yet he restrained himself. This was his home and men did not go around beating up schoolboys.

Karl asked, "Have you ever fought in a war? Have you ever had bombs blowing up all around you; dead bodies everywhere you looked? How do you know how you'd respond?"

"All *I* know," Heinrich said, "is that I wouldn't have gone yellow like you."

Karl was using all of his strength to contain his anger. "That's what you *assume*."

"That's what I *know*," stated the bespectacled boy.

"All right," Karl replied as calmly as he could. "Let me give you a bit of advice: one more word about Helga—anything—and I'm going to hurt

you. I don't care that you're nothing more than an ignorant, malicious little boy. Take my word for it."

Heinrich laughed. "Your word! What does that mean? You gave your word to defend Germany and what did you do? You chickened out. You obviously can't understand this but there is one thing that means more than anything else to a *true* German—loyalty to the Fatherland."

Karl quickly turned away, his hands balled up into fists, his face burning red. "You heard me," he said stomping away, the words sounding feeble in his own ears.

When Helga mentioned the paint on the front door to Karl later that day, Karl did not tell her that he already knew or that he had confronted Heinrich. He simply gritted his teeth and looked away.

At 6:00 A.M. the next morning, Mr. Kleinschmidt closed his freshly-scrubbed front door and found "Slut" painted there instead. He waited a moment before going in and telling his wife. "Why would anyone want to

pick on Helga? She's such a good girl," he whispered to himself. Deeply saddened, he opened the door and went back inside.

Dr. Mann's first patient of the morning was fat Mrs. Gronblatt with an infection in her leg. Mr. Gronblatt and Karl helped her into the office and up onto the examination table. Gently, Karl lifted her fleshy swollen leg.

"So, Karl, I suppose you've already heard about what the Kleinschmidts found painted on their front door," said the 250-pound gossipmonger conversationally.

Karl frowned. "Yes, Mrs. Gronblatt, I was one of the first to hear yesterday." With the sensitive touch of a good doctor Karl turned her enormous leg to inspect the infected sore.

"That was yesterday, Karl. Today they found something new which I won't repeat because I'm a good Christian woman."

Every muscle in Karl's body tightened, including his fingers on her leg, causing her to yelp in pain . . .

As Karl stormed up the street he envisioned beating the living hell out of Heinrich: smashing his stupid glasses into his eyes, then breaking his arm, then stomping on his leg until it broke, too. I'll be branded a child-beating coward, but I don't give a damn! He turned the corner onto Gebhard's street and expected Heinrich to be right there just like the day before, but instead the street was vacant. He turned back heading toward the school, following the route that he and Gebhard had taken together so many times in their youth.

Only a small part of the huge 500-year-old former university building was now in use for the 150 boys, ages twelve to eighteen. When Karl arrived the entire upper class was in the courtyard awaiting admittance from the headmaster. And there amongst them was Heinrich.

"*You!*" Karl boomed, pointing his finger.

Everyone went dead quiet and watched.

Karl stepped forward. He was bigger than every one of them. A child-beating coward. How, he thought, did I ever end up here?

"I'm talking to you, Heinrich Himmler! I told you yesterday that if you said or did one more slanderous thing against Helga Kleinschmidt I'd hurt you." Karl walked right up to the boney little double-chinned runt, and with the rhythm of stepping forward brought his right fist straight through as hard as he could into Himmler's belly.

It was like a train hit him. He folded up, then hit the ground like a sack of flour. The stunned spectators all watched in silence.

Karl took a deep breath, straightened his collar, turned and walked away. Simultaneously, 150 boys burst into applause and laughter. The malicious little son of a bitch had finally got what was coming to him.

As Karl left the courtyard everyone pushed forward to get a good look at Heinrich. He opened his eyes and found everybody looking down at him. His glasses were gone and he couldn't breathe. If only he hadn't opened his eyes and let them know he was conscious because suddenly he felt like he had to vomit, which he proceeded to do on several classmates' shoes. They all hastily backed away with a massive, disgusted groan.

Heinrich watched himself puke, praying to God that blood would come out because that would be the only thing that would save him now. However, when his breakfast finished coming up, no blood followed, just dry heaves.

Headmaster Himmler began ringing the bell from inside, on his way out. Very leisurely, they all sauntered toward the door. Something big was coming and none of them wanted to miss it. Heinrich was the type to start fights between other people, yet he was never around when his father, the headmaster, arrived.

Well, he'd certainly be around when he arrived today.

Heinrich got up to one knee holding his aching stomach, and there was his father storming across the courtyard directly toward him, utterly oblivious of who it was crouching on the ground.

"What's going on here?" the headmaster demanded sternly.

Heinrich looked up, puke running down his chin, and that was when his father recognized him.

"Heinrich?" he gasped. "Who did this to you?"

All was lost, thought Heinrich rising to his feet, wiping his mouth and chin on his sleeve. “I can’t tell you.”

The headmaster began to sputter furiously and bellowed, “*By God you will tell me!*” He looked back and saw the entire upper class watching. “That’s one thing you can be certain of!”

“No,” Heinrich stated with finality.

“You would stand there and defy me in front of the whole school? My son?” At which point he exploded, grabbing Heinrich by his collar, as he had so often done to all of the others, and dragged him down to his office. The crowd parted to let them through. Once they had passed all of the boys burst into laughter again.

Who said there was no justice in the world?

If Heinrich told his father that Karl Mann had hit him there would be far too many questions and the painting on the Kleinschmidts’ door would most assuredly come out. Headmaster Himmler knew Karl well: he had been an exemplary student, his eldest son’s best friend, and he’d always

liked him. Heinrich tried and tried to think of a way of blaming it on the fact that Karl was a coward, but couldn't imagine how he could make it stick. Karl was clearly to blame for all of this, Heinrich was certain of that, but that's absolutely not how it would look to his father. Heinrich was certain of that, too.

Chapter Three

The moment Headmaster Himmler turned his back, Heinrich took off running. He tore across the school's courtyard, past the puddle of vomit, and out onto the thoroughfare.

"Get back here!" his father hollered. "You'll have to face up to this sooner or later!"

As Heinrich ran up the street he thought, this is not my fault and I won't take any punishment because of it. Why in hell had Karl Mann returned to Landshut? Why couldn't he have died like a good German on the battlefield? Or been captured? Or something? As he passed Karl's house, the pain in his belly still rather intense, he thought, you'll pay for this you coward!

But when he reached his own street his mind turned to other things. Please don't let my mother be home, he prayed. He sneaked around to the back of his house and peered in the kitchen window. No one was there. Coming in through the back door Heinrich yelled, "Hello!" and got no

response. Wiping his sweaty brow, he went up the stairs to his parents' bedroom. Going directly to the closet, he yanked out his father's black valise, then went into his and Gebhard's room. Sensing his mother's imminent return, Heinrich hurriedly packed the suitcase. He took his two other white shirts, with frayed collars, two oft-mended pairs of black wool trousers, two jackets he had inherited from Gebhard, three pairs of black socks, a photograph of his mother, then he paused for a moment and finally grabbed his brother's razor, mug and hair brush. Taking one quick last look, he decided that he needed nothing else and left.

Carrying his father's valise, Heinrich took a circuitous route to the train station, avoiding both the school and anywhere his mother might be.

He took a seat on the platform and began counting the money in his change purse. Not much, but possibly enough for a one-way ticket to Munich. With a look of firm resolution he rose to his feet, grabbed the door handle to the station and found it locked.

A middle-aged man passing by saw Heinrich's befuddled expression and said, "The station's closed."

"When will it open?" Heinrich asked.

The man looked at him with contempt. "There's a war on, boy. Don't you know that? The train stopped running a month ago. Didn't you notice? The only trains running on the tracks these days are strictly military."

Heinrich was so confused that he could barely speak. "I . . . I don't usually take trains. How can I get to Munich?"

"Munich?" the man laughed. "And why, may I ask, does a young boy like you want to go to Munich?"

"To join the army," Heinrich said proudly. "And fight for my country."

"A noble cause. Unfortunately, if you want to get to Munich you'll have to walk. By the way, aren't you a bit young to be leaving home and joining the army?"

Heinrich looked the man straight in the eye. "No."

"Well, excuse me," the man said moving on. "Have a nice walk."

At a nearby store Heinrich purchased two tins of sardines, a box of crackers, a can of peaches, and a bottle of soda water. Having spent nearly half of his money, he loaded everything into his suitcase and set off down the railroad tracks.

As the sun set behind the alpines covering the sides of the mountains for the third time since his departure, Heinrich wistfully thought of his running shoes sitting at home in his closet: they were expertly crafted in Sweden, made of canvas with rubber soles, came up over the ankle, with thick leather laces. The first time he saw them in the catalogue he knew he had to have them. He was fourteen, the war had just begun, and they cost twelve marks, which was pretty steep for a pair of shoes, and besides, he was fourteen and would outgrow them in no time. Heinrich would hear none of this. If he didn't have the running shoes he would die—or possibly continue pitching a fit forever. His mother finally convinced his father and he got them. And they were great. And in less than a year his feet had grown a size and a half and they no longer fit. So now, on his third day of

nonstop walking through the foothills of the Bavarian Alps in his black leather shoes, his feet were a blistered bloody mess.

"It can't be much further to Munich, I've been walking forever!"

Four miles outside the city he came upon the training base for the 11th Bavarian Infantry. There seemed to be almost no one there, but nevertheless, Heinrich was elated. His dream of fighting for his country was about to come true.

Heinrich stepped off of the railroad tracks and approached the sleepy-looking sentry at the front gate. The soldier came to life with a start, pointing his rifle at Heinrich.

"Who goes there?"

"Excuse me," Heinrich said happily. "Who do I speak to about joining up?"

"Go away, kid, I'm busy."

"I'm serious," Heinrich declared, "I want to join the army."

"I can't stand here and talk to you," the soldier said, returning to his original, slouching position. "If you're really serious, go talk to Sergeant

Mueller over there." He pointed to a wooden building inside the wire enclosure.

"Thank you," said Heinrich going through the gate. "Thank you very much."

"Sergeant Mueller!" Himmler stated, snapping to attention. "I'd like to join the army."

"And why," said the weary-looking soldier sitting behind a quagmire of paperwork, "do you want to do that?"

"To fight for my country, sir!"

Sergeant Mueller nodded. "That's fine, but you're a little late, don't you think?"

"This is as soon as I could get here, sir."

"Well," the soldier sighed, rising to his feet, "I'm sure we can find something for you to do. Follow me."

Beaming, Heinrich followed.

With his head shaved and wearing the uniform of a private, Heinrich stood up to his knees in mud and shit as he dug out a latrine trench. It was a cold November day and steam billowed out of his mouth. A big, burly, no-neck corporal with a flat nose approached Heinrich, who immediately snapped to attention.

"You can forget that now," the corporal said. "The war's over. The armistice was signed today."

Heinrich slumped in despair. "But I never got to fight. I never even got to fire a gun."

"It's a lot safer shoveling shit," smiled the corporal. "You may as well climb out of there and get cleaned up."

Heinrich stayed where he was and shook his head. "How could we have surrendered? We beat the Russians."

"We didn't beat the Russians; they gave up. Besides," the corporal said, rubbing his flat, crooked nose, "you can't take on the whole world. You're bound to lose eventually."

"We could have won!" Heinrich declared.

"But we didn't. Now get cleaned up. Everyone's going into town to get drunk."

"But it's almost roll call."

The corporal shook his head. "No more roll call. The army's disbanded. It's part of the armistice agreement."

Heinrich slumped further. "What will I do? I have nowhere to go."

"Get a job," the corporal muttered, walking away. "But now it's time to get drunk."

Heinrich sat down on the muddy edge of the trench. What was he going to do here a long way from home with his hair shaved off and the war over and nowhere to go? All he knew was that he had *really* wanted to fight for his country and now he couldn't.

"I'd have been a good soldier if I'd just had the chance," he said.

No one heard or cared.

"Another beer?" Walter Hossbach asked, standing up and heading to the bar.

"Okay," Karl replied, finishing his beer and wiping off his foam mustache.

Walter got two more mugs of beer and sat down. "So, soon you'll be leaving for medical school in Munich. Then I won't have anyone to argue with."

"We don't argue; you lecture."

"Whatever," Walter said, waving it away. "I'll have no one to intellectually converse with. I may drop in on you in Munich sometime."

"Helga and me," replied Karl with a grin.

"Oh, really? Does she know?"

"Not yet."

Walter smiled, removing his thick glasses revealing a rather handsome, nearly blind man. "It's a political hotbed there in Munich. Since the war ended hundreds of new political factions have sprung up all over

the place. It's extremely possible that the Communists will take over. I'm going to have to be part of it."

Karl finished his beer. "You're always welcome, Walter."

Helga and Karl were married in a small ceremony performed by Father Grunner at the Lutheran church. They decided not to go anywhere for their honeymoon, but instead save the money for Karl's tuition. Helga moved in with Karl at the Mann residence where there was plenty of extra room and went about returning the house to a home. Certain things had not been done in six years since Mrs. Mann had died, and Helga happily put herself to the task while Dr. Mann and Karl ran the clinic. The curtains in the kitchen, for instance, were so yellowed with smoke and grease that Helga just threw them out and sewed new ones. She chose a light green fabric that gave the kitchen a completely new feeling, causing both Karl and the doctor to comment on how refreshing it looked, like being in the woods or a park. That being such a success, Helga made new green curtains for the whole house. She scrubbed the carpets and the walls,

rearranged the furniture and generally had at least one of her four sisters over helping her.

And just when the house was really becoming a nice place to live, the new year arrived and it was time for she and Karl to leave for Munich. Alfred made arrangements for the young couple to stay with an old college friend of his, and with their few bags in hand and tears in their eyes, Karl and Helga left everyone they knew behind and boarded the train.

Chapter Four

Munich, 1919

Munich was the third largest city in Germany, after Berlin and Hamburg, and the capital of Bavaria. With over six hundred thousand people, it was home to many of Europe's finest universities and biggest corporations. Founded in 1158, Munich was one of the oldest and proudest cities in Germany. Crisscrossed with cathedrals, arches, and bridges spanning the Isar River, some of which were over seven hundred years old, Munich now had hundreds of electric trolley cars servicing the entire city, as well as multitudes of automobiles, and still many horse-drawn wagons and carts clopping and clattering by, the horses constantly relieving themselves on the cobblestone streets.

Politically, Germany was in turmoil. After the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II on November 9th, 1918, and the signing of the armistice on November 11th, the German military under Communist influence incited the short-lived "German Revolution," installing a "National Democratic" government. The politicians who had been in power for a very short time

at the end of the war had been forced into signing the armistice that banned Germany from having any sort of military anymore, thus forcing millions of German soldiers into dire unemployment. Under the command of General Erich von Ludendorff, the military foisted the blame for the signing of the armistice on the National Democratic Parliament and the Communist revolutionaries. This became known as the "stab-in-the-back" legend, and the politicians became known as the "November Criminals," thus relieving the military of all responsibility.

Within the 350-year-old walls of the Munich Medical Academy, things were also changing, only a lot more subtly. Although new medical procedures were regularly accepted and worked into the curriculum, the Academy's teaching techniques remained very much as they always had been—strict and unforgiving.

On the first day of class all five hundred freshmen—soon to be winnowed down to far fewer—sat expectantly in the main amphitheater. When everyone had quieted down, the professor stepped before the class

wearing long black rubber gloves and a black rubber apron over his vest and tie. Behind him two orderlies rolled out a surgical table with troughs running down either side. Upon the table reposed the naked corpse of an elderly man, now greenish-brown in color.

Karl sat near the front beside a handsome, smiling young man with thick dark hair and a space between his front teeth. “This is where they separate the men from the boys,” he remarked to Karl.

“I guess so.”

The professor introduced himself, then stepped behind the table, took a scalpel and began to dissect the cadaver while naming the various organs and their functions as he removed them. Within the first two minutes seven people departed the amphitheater looking pale and nauseous. Before ninety minutes was up it totaled twelve, though neither Karl nor the fellow beside him.

After class the dark-eyed smiling student stopped Karl in the hallway. “That was really something, wasn’t it?”

"Yeah," Karl agreed. "A lot of people couldn't watch. In a way I was having a bit of trouble, too, and I've seen a lot of operations."

"You have?" he inquired eagerly.

"Oh yes, quite a few. My father is a doctor and I've been assisting him for the past year. An operation is fascinating; a dissection is kind of horrible."

"Oh, I don't think so. I thought it was great. I can't wait to see real surgery, and do it." He put out his hand. "I'm Josef Mengele."

"Nice to make your acquaintance, I'm Karl Mann."

They shook hands.

"I'll see you in class," Mengele said, rushing off.

"Yes, indeed," said Karl watching him go. He chuckled to himself. "Now that's an eager student. He'll probably make a first-rate doctor."

Karl set out to find a job. He tried a nearby bookstore, two pharmacies, a men's haberdashery, a creamery, a butcher shop, an auto repair shop and a dry cleaner before despondently giving up for the day.

Before going back to the Goldmans' house and facing Helga, he dropped in at the Buergerbraukeller, an enormous beer hall that seated three thousand, sat down at the bar and ordered a pint of beer from a pot-bellied bartender with long, white, curled mustaches.

"You're new around here," the bartender stated, setting the beer mug before Karl.

"Yes, I am," Karl agreed, sipping the beer. "I'm living just up the street."

"Where?" the man asked pleasantly. "I know everyone around here."

"With Dr. Goldman. He's a friend of my father."

"Ralf Goldman is a good friend of mine," the bartender proclaimed, fiddling with his mustache. "When did you move in?"

"Less than a week ago," Karl replied. "My wife and I."

"And why, if you don't mind me asking, is a nice young married man like yourself out drinking in the afternoon?"

Karl finished his beer and sighed. “I’ve looked for a job at ten different places today and was turned down by everyone. If I don’t get a job soon I won’t be able to stay in school and I just started today.”

The bartender pointed to his left. “Here at the university?”

Karl pointed to his left. “No, at the Medical Academy.”

“Ah, a doctor.”

“Not yet,” Karl said finishing his beer and rising to his feet. “Not unless I can get a job so that I can pay for it.”

The bartender twirled his mustache around his finger. “I don’t know how much being a doctor means to you, but I’ll give you a job.”

Karl sat back down, joyous and amazed. “You will?”

“Yes, but the hours will be terrible for your studies. I’ll need you here at 2:00 in the morning when I close to clean up and you won’t be done until sunrise. When is your first class?”

“At 7:30, but that’s all right, I’ll take it.”

“Fine. The job is yours. I’ll pay you ten marks a week and you can start tonight.”

Karl stood again, this time smiling. “Thank you very much. My name is Karl Mann.” He put out his hand.

The bartender took it in his huge paw. “Morris Altschuler. When do you intend to sleep, Karl?”

“I’ll find the time.” He dug in his pocket and withdrew a few coins. Mr. Altschuler stopped him.

“My employees are allowed one free beer a month. You just had yours.”

Karl turned to leave. “I’ll see you at two.”

The Buergerbraukeller, with its ridiculously long wooden tables and benches, was cleaned by Karl and five other people during the four hours it was closed every night. It was a massive job that never really got done. All of the other cleaners were over sixty years of age, and were, for the most part, bums: three other men and two women. From the moment Karl began, the others pretended that he was the employee, they were his bosses, and if he looked too tired they had the authority to make him lie

down on a bench and take a nap. Karl tried to refuse at first, but the others wouldn't hear of it, so, what the hell, he took a nap.

Several weeks later, Helga got a job in a dress factory running a sewing machine. She too was making ten marks a week (for considerably more work). With their combined income of twenty marks per week they were able to pay Karl's tuition and still support themselves, with regular free meals from Dr. and Mrs. Goldman. Karl's father also sent money whenever he could, as did Helga's parents, and so, one way and another, they got by. Both were overworked and tired most of the time, but they were happy and in love.

Chapter Five

1921

In every war in history the victors had always demanded and received spoils—their compensation for having fought the war in the first place. The "Great War" of 1914-1918 was no exception. The Allied conquerors demanded "reparations" of approximately nineteen billion U.S. dollars from the Germans. Unfortunately, the Germans had used up every available deutsche mark financing the war for four years, and therefore had no funds left to pay the reparations. Also, with the fall of the military economy, as well as the Allied destruction of many of Germany's largest factories, Germany had no way to produce goods to sell, and thus no way to earn the money needed to pay their debts. The Allied countries took no pity, their attitude being the same as every victorious country in history, "You started the war, now pay up." The German economy promptly fell apart and the worst inflation in the history of mankind befell them.

Nevertheless, over sixty million Germans continued to live their lives and somehow got by. Young people desired and demanded more than

they had, and reactionary groups sprang up everywhere to challenge the powers that were seemingly holding them back.

Heinrich Himmler had just begun his third semester at the Munich Technical College where he was majoring in agriculture. He loved the idea of being a farmer, dependent on no one but his own hard work and knowledge. He had always had his own vegetable garden at home and it was something that he enjoyed and did well. So he decided to get a college degree, then start a farm. That was his plan. He would also raise chickens because they were a double-moneymaker: eggs and meat. That was an idea he had picked up in school.

Class had just ended and it was bitter cold as Heinrich stepped outside. He had recently grown a small mustache that covered the center of his lip. His rimless pince-nez glasses immediately fogged up and he removed them. It was over a mile walk to his cousin's house where he was presently lodging. As he crossed the Zirkus Krone—a vast empty cobblestone square where the circus set up their tents when they were in

town—it was glacially cold with bitter, high-speed winds whipping that made Heinrich wince. As he walked up the narrow street that approached the Zirkus Krone, there were suddenly a lot of people filling the street. It must be some sort of political rally, he thought unconcerned since there always seemed to be one going on somewhere in Munich these days. There were posters plastered all over the walls stating it to be a meeting of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. That was a mouthful. At the bottom of the poster it said, "No Jews Allowed." Who were these guys? Heinrich ignored the whole thing and turned the corner . . .

There were more than five thousand people packed into the Zirkus Krone. In front of the crowd was a scaffold platform with a microphone resting upon it and a large horn speaker beside it. Five men sat on chairs at the back of the platform while others scurried about setting up. Above them hung a red flag at the center of which reposed a black swastika on a white circular background. At the top of the flag it read, "The National Socialist German Workers' Party," and at the bottom, "Germany Awake!"

Most of the crowd was composed of young men and women, mostly in their twenties and thirties, quite a few ex-soldiers still wearing their uniforms and many missing limbs, as well as quite a few workers carrying lunch pails. Heinrich could sense something in the air. An electricity. These people were clearly very interested in this political rally, unlike the multitude of others he'd seen. Although these folks simply appeared to be talking and laughing and having a good time while they waited, there was an undercurrent of anger—these people wanted a change. Inexplicably, Heinrich was also becoming excited.

A chilly squelch ripped from the speaker as a thin, older man with glasses tapped the microphone.

"Good evening, everyone. We of the National Socialist movement do not believe in standing upon undue formalities. We like to get right to the issue at hand. Our first speaker is one of the founders of the party, one of the most decorated heroes of the war, having received the Pour le Merite, the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a soldier, was a member of the famed Flying Circus of Baron von Richtofen, and has fifteen downed

enemy planes to his everlasting credit. Ladies and Gentlemen, Captain Hermann Goering!"

The crowd cheered and Heinrich felt overwhelmed. This was one of the greatest war heroes Germany had ever produced, and he was striding toward the microphone right in front of him. *The* Hermann Goering! Tall, handsome, broad-chested, a wide attractive face that could produce a terrible frown or joyous ingratiating smile, occasionally within seconds of each other. He was a founding member of the National Socialist party? What was it they were calling themselves? Oh, yes, Nazis. Hermann Goering was a Nazi? But then again, why not? Everybody was joining clubs these days, so why not him?

"Good evening, everyone," Goering boomed with a tremendous grin. "It's a beautiful night for a revolution, eh?"

Everyone laughed heartily, as did Himmler.

The Goldmans had donated a large linen closet to Karl as a study area. A desk would not fit inside, so he used an end table. The remainder of

the area was filled with papers, books, and a small blackboard upon which he wrote the most important information he needed to memorize. Sipping cold tea, Karl tried to make everything he'd just read stay in his head.

Mrs. Goldman, a friendly, heavyset, fifty-year-old Jewish woman, knocked on the door, then immediately opened it. Karl was relieved that a distraction had arrived.

"Excuse me, Karl, but you have a visitor."

"A visitor?" No one ever visited him—Helga had the occasional visitor, but not him.

Walter Hossbach entered wearing a suit with knickers, a straw boater hat, and carrying a suitcase. Karl couldn't believe it.

"Walter, what are you doing here?"

Smiling, Mrs. Goldman shut the door.

Walter set down his suitcase and removed his hat. "You said I was always welcome to stay with you. Well here I am."

Karl stood and the two old friends vigorously shook hands. “I’m really glad to see you, Walter. I certainly can use the diversion. My head is so full of facts I can barely think.”

“That’s not my problem,” Walter said. “Very few facts make it all the way to Landshut. By the time they arrive they’re considered idle rumors and summarily ignored. So, what’s Munich like? The last time I was here I was twelve years old. Where are the good places to go? Where are all the pretty girls?”

Karl laughed. “You’re asking the wrong person. I don’t do anything but go to school, study and work. Ask Helga.”

“All right, where is she?”

“She’s putting in overtime at the factory,” Karl frowned. “She shouldn’t be working this much, but we need the money.”

“Tonight,” Walter decreed, “everything is my treat. Now, let’s get something to eat, I’m famished.”

As they walked up the Haydnstrasse Walter was amazed by everything: the streetcars, the tall buildings, and particularly all the people.

"Would you like to eat at someplace nice," asked Karl, "or someplace cheap?"

Walter tilted his head back to see to the top of the spire of a very tall, old cathedral and his hat fell off. "Cheap and nice. If not nice, bohemian."

"That's what I was hoping you'd say. At the Buergerbraukeller where I work we'll either get a discount, or it might even be free if Mr. Altschuler is in a good mood. And it's *very* bohemian."

"Sounds like my kind of place," Walter smiled, clapping his hands. "Lead on."

The Buergerbraukeller was full to capacity, a rare occurrence in Karl's limited perspective. He always arrived when the last stragglers were hanging on and stumbling out. Now, every table was crowded, many with political groups busily hollering at each other. The din was overwhelming.

Karl and Walter seated themselves on a wooden bench at a long wooden table and were approached by a buxom blonde in a puffy skirt and

black hose, the uniform of the waitresses. “Hello, Karl, have you decided to try the beer?”

“And the food.”

“What happened, did your rich uncle die?”

“No,” Karl grinned. “My spendthrift friend from home came to visit. Lisle, this is my friend, Walter.”

Walter stood up, formally bowed and shook her hand. “My pleasure, madam.”

“I like him already,” Lisle said. “And what would you two handsome gentlemen like?”

“Sauerbraten,” Walter said. “And a mug of the best beer in the house.”

“You’d be surprised how much the best beer and the worst beer taste alike here,” Karl commented.

“Quiet,” scolded Lisle. “We have the very best beer in Munich. And for you, Herr Doctor?”

"I'll have the corned beef and cabbage . . . and a mug of the best beer in the house."

Hermann Goering finished his speech to resounding applause. He bowed, smiled triumphantly, then gave a few taps on the microphone quieting everyone down.

"I would like to introduce," Goering said, "the chairman of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, a war hero with both the Iron Cross Second Class and the Iron Cross First Class—ladies and gentlemen, Adolf Hitler!"

To Heinrich's surprise everyone clapped just as hard for this guy as they did for Hermann Goering. Who was this Hitler person following Goering as though he were more important? Two Iron Crosses was impressive, but still . . .

A man of five-foot-eight with wide dark eyes, straight dark hair and a Charlie Chaplin mustache (similar to his own, and quite common) shook hands with Goering, then stepped before the microphone. He paused for a

moment until there was complete silence, then burst forth with a powerful, stentorian voice.

"Fellow Germans. I made a vow to myself three years ago when I was a blind cripple in the military hospital: to know neither rest nor peace until the November Criminals have been overthrown and until on the ruins of the wretched Germany of today there should arise once more a Germany of power and greatness, of freedom and splendor!"

The whole crowd, including Heinrich, burst into wild ecstatic cheering and applause. Adolf Hitler remained impassive, a slight grin raising a corner of his mouth.

Karl and Walter walked up the street talking. Walter lit a cigarette, continuing his somewhat drunken diatribe.

"The point is," he stated emphatically, blowing out the match, "the Socialist Democrats haven't done *anything* yet; they haven't had a chance. They're being called 'November Criminals' for the surrender and the Versailles Treaty, and they weren't even in power in November. That was

Hindenburg and his band of idiots, and luckily for them they escaped the country before they got strung up on lampposts. So the poor stupid Socialist Democrats are taking the blame for what happened before them and they're not smart enough to clear it up. And even if they did surrender and sign the Versailles Treaty, which they didn't, what's the goddamn difference? The Allies didn't ask us if we *wanted* to sign; they *told* us to sign. So what were we supposed to do, tell them no?"

Karl shrugged allowing his friend to go on.

"Of course not, they had just defeated us in a war. It's certainly a shame that we lost, the German pride can't stand losing, but they didn't march in and burn down our cities, rape our women, then split up our land between them. They demanded that we sign a piece of paper. So who says we have to honor it? They're not going to start another war because we can't pay the reparations."

"The French did move into the Ruhr Valley nearly freezing all production in this country," Karl interjected.

Walter shook his head, picking tobacco from his lips. “The French are idiots, and historically always have been. Now what is the point of freezing production in a country where you’re demanding payments of reparation? Make up your mind. They’ll leave the Ruhr because it was asinine to move into it in the first place.”

“What if they annex it?”

“They won’t. Those are good Germans living in the Ruhr. They hate the French and the French hate them. It would never work out. The problem with most people is that they don’t remember history; even recent history. ”

Karl smiled and shrugged. “So, what’s the answer?”

Walter smiled back. “Why, Communism, of course.”

As Karl and Walter drunkenly staggered home and neared the Zirkus Krone, they found thousands of people dispersing.

“My God, what was happening here?” Walter asked.

"It was a meeting of the National Socialist German Workers' Party," said a young man with a thin, sunken face, blazing eyes, strangely spaced teeth, and attired in a trench coat.

"Who are they?" Walter inquired.

"A crackpot militant revolutionary group," the young man spat. "They've got the great Hermann Goering with them, and some fellow named Hitler, but I don't think they have a pot to piss in."

The newspaper reporter in Walter suddenly emerged. "Why not?"

"There are too many militant revolutionary groups at this time. The market is glutted."

"And what do you do?" Walter asked.

Smiling and revealing is odd teeth, the man said, "I'm a novelist."

Both Walter and Karl looked impressed.

"Can we get your books?" Walter asked.

"Soon. I have a novel under consideration from a major publishing firm here in Munich. It's called, *Michael: Pages from a German Destiny*, and I think it's quite good, if I do say so myself."

"And who are you?"

"Goebbels. Joseph Goebbles. This is just my first book. I have a hundred more to write."

"Good luck," Walter offered.

"Thank you," said Goebbels, promptly turning away.

"Well," Karl said, kicking debris as they crossed the Zirkus Krone, "I'm glad we missed that. Let's go get Helga and get another beer."

Walter watched the young man in the trench coat limp off into the retreating crowd, then shrugged. "Sure, why not. Another beer sounds grand. "

Chapter Six

1922

On a school trip to Gmund am Tegernsee, Austria, on the shore of Lake Tegernsee, Heinrich beheld the most fertile soil that he had ever beheld. Thick rich wet soil that would grow anything. This is what life is about, he thought. I'll have a huge farm, a pure, beautiful wife, and I'll grow all of my own food. Those silly fools back in the city spend all of their lives drinking beer while chasing after ridiculous loose women and the corruption of money. A total waste of life. Planting seeds and cultivating them, that's why God put human beings here on Earth. And I must join some clubs, Heinrich thought. It makes no difference that the fencing club turned me down—the pigs! And that all of the other clubs seem to be ignoring my applications. There are still other clubs and I'll join them, make important contacts, move ahead in life, then I'll buy a farm along this river. And prosper."

When several other clubs and groups, including the National Socialists, wouldn't have him, Heinrich made application to the Apollo Club, an intellectual group he knew very little about. They automatically accepted him, for they refused no one; it was part of their university bylaws so that they could remain university sponsored. A young professor of philosophy, Dr. Abraham Ofner, was president and founder of the club. There were twenty-five members and they met at a *steinhaus* near the university.

Since Heinrich had made his application by mail, he was notified of his acceptance in the same manner. And so he found himself sitting in his clean, barren little room, letter in hand, now a member of a club where he had not yet met a single other member, but still . . . he'd been accepted. Finally accepted.

He showed up that Wednesday night promptly at 7:30 meticulously shaved and shorn, his rimless glasses affixed firmly to his nose.

At a long table across the smoky room someone waved at him. Heinrich approached nervously. The fellow who waved stepped up to

meet him. He was a tall thin swarthy man with curly black hair and a long hooked nose.

"You must be Heinrich Himmler. I'm Dr. Abraham Ofner, president of the Apollo Club. Welcome." He walked Heinrich to the table.

"Gentlemen," Ofner smiled, "our new member, Heinrich Himmler."

Twenty pairs of shrewd smiling eyes stared up at him. They all seemed honestly happy to see him.

"Good evening," Heinrich croaked.

"Won't you sit down," offered Dr. Ofner.

Heinrich sat and the man to his right, also with a dark complexion, poured him a mug of beer.

"No thank you," Heinrich said, "I don't usually drink beer."

"You don't drink beer," blurted someone else. "That's one of the main objectives of our club."

There was a hardy note of agreement from all the rest of the members, most of whom seemed to have dark hair and complexions. Why did they all look this way? wondered Heinrich. Maybe they were

Austrians. Well, if drinking beer was part of being in the club, he supposed he'd have to drink beer. Heinrich accepted the proffered mug and took a sip. Ugh! How could they possibly enjoy this bitter, nasty stuff?

"Very good," said Heinrich.

"So," one of the men at the table asked, "you want to be a member of our illustrious club, eh?"

"Aren't I already a member?"

"Of course, anyone can be a member," said another. "As long as we all agree they deserve to be a member. This is an intellectual club, and we don't want any dullards holding us back."

Heinrich was slightly offended. "Well then, what are the criteria?"

They all looked at each other, then Dr. Ofner spoke. "Impress us."

"With what?" Heinrich asked.

"Your knowledge."

Heinrich smiled. "That's absurd. What do you want to know?"

"What do you want to tell us?"

"Nothing."

"Then why do we want you in our club?"

"I don't know," said Heinrich. "It sounded like an interesting club to join."

"Well," said one fellow loudly, "I guess that takes care of that."

"That takes care of what?" interjected Himmler. "I want to be a member of your club."

"No one said you couldn't," said Dr. Ofner. "We're just interested in *why* you want to be a member of our club."

Heinrich was having severe difficulty understanding these people. "Because I want to be a member of a club."

"*Any* club?"

Now he was getting flustered. "Well . . . because all of the other clubs wouldn't have me and you would."

"Ah . . ." everyone said, acknowledging the root of the problem.

"And why," asked a fellow with a thick dark beard and glasses, "wouldn't any of the other clubs have you?"

Heinrich was really beginning to feel put-upon. "*Their* criteria."

"Could you elaborate?"

"Well, I'm not a good enough swordsman to join the fencing club, they didn't think I was big enough for the boxing club, I haven't read enough books for the literary club, and I don't speak Greek or Latin, so I didn't even try those clubs."

"What makes you think," continued the man with the beard, "that you fulfill the criteria of the Apollo Club?"

"But you said you didn't have any criteria."

"Other than impressing us," a man added who was missing his right arm. "I, personally, don't feel particularly impressed."

"W-w-well," Himmler stammered, "you haven't given me a chance. I didn't know."

"That's true," said Dr. Ofner. "Would you feel more comfortable trying again next week?"

"Yes," Heinrich happily sighed. "A week to prepare sounds good."

The doctor smiled back. "That's fine. What topic shall we expect your discourse to be on?"

"Topic? What topic?"

"That's up to you, Herr Himmler. Philosophy is our general topic of discussion. Would you care to hold forth on say, Soren Kierkegaard? Or perhaps Schopenhauer?"

"Who?" Heinrich asked, looking lost.

Everyone burst out laughing. Heinrich suddenly grew furious. Who in hell were these people?

"Aren't you a student here at the university?" the man without an arm asked.

"Yes, of course," Heinrich lied since the Munich Technical College was not a part of the university.

"What, may I ask, are you majoring in?"

"Agriculture."

Everyone once again laughed heartily.

"That's a fine proletariat subject," added Dr. Ofner. "Assuredly useful to the masses. Discourse on any subject you care to, Heinrich. Tell us

about agriculture. All topics are welcome. We await your lecture with bated breath."

"All right," said Heinrich, burning with fury. He went to take another sip of beer, decided against it, pushed the mug away, and without a backward glance, stood and left. Before he reached the door he heard them all laughing again. He grew red in the face with embarrassment.

I don't think I like these fellows, he thought. There's something foreign about them. And what in the name of God will I talk about next week?

Two days later Heinrich was informed at school by one of the members of the Rifle Club that he would be considered for membership if he was a good enough marksman. The Rifle Club met just outside the city by a wooded hillside every Saturday afternoon. Heinrich walked the four miles out to the countryside carrying his war surplus Lee-Enfield .303 carbine in a canvas bag that he had made himself. In fact, he was quite a good shot and was immediately accepted into the ranks.

He was feeling rather pleased with himself when a stocky, tough-looking man with a bull-neck, the sides of his hair shaved off, and a small Charlie Chaplin mustache just like his own, approached him.

"Hello," he said amiably. "You're new here."

"Yes," Heinrich said, shaking the man's big rough hand. "Are you a member of the Rifle Club?"

"No. I'm the president of the Reichskriegsflagge, a military club, and many of the members are also with the Rifle Club. My name is Ernst Roehm."

"Heinrich Himmler. Are you looking for new members for your group?"

"Always," said Roehm. "May I see your rifle?"

"Certainly." Heinrich handed it to him. "It's a British Lee-Enfield .303."

"I know," Roehm stated, pulling back the bolt and looking down the barrel. "I've had quite a few bullets fired at me from rifles like this. It's in good condition. You keep your weapon clean." He snapped the bolt back

into place and handed the rifle to Heinrich. “Would you like to join the Reichskriegsflagge? You seem like you might be the sort who would enjoy it.”

“I’d love to join. Where and when do you meet?”

At the Buergerbraukeller on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in the evening.”

“Three times a week,” Heinrich said, disassembling his carbine. “That’s a lot.”

“Well,” Roehm offered with a smile, “we’re not just shooting off rifles or playing chess. We’re figuring out how to change things. Get Germany back on its feet.”

Everyone else had left or was preparing to leave and Heinrich began reassembling his rifle.

“Do you need a ride back to the city?” Roehm asked.

“Oh, yes. I walked all the way out here.”

The big man put his huge hand on Heinrich’s shoulder. “I like you, Heinrich. You’ve got starch in your collar.”

"Thanks."

Roehm left his hand on Heinrich's shoulder for a second more, then quickly removed it.

As they drove back in Roehm's 1916 Ford Model T, Heinrich remembered something. "Oh, I won't be able to make it to your meetings on Wednesdays, I'm with another club—or at least I think I am."

"You certainly are with enough clubs, which one is this?"

Heinrich could hear them all laughing at him and the humiliated anger welled back up.

"The Apollo Club. But they haven't accepted me. Or they have, but not really."

Roehm turned to him in surprise. "The Apollo Club? That's one of those Jew clubs. What do you want with them?"

Heinrich rolled his eyes. "So that's what they were. Jews. I knew there was something strange about them."

Ernst Roehm burst out laughing. “You sure haven’t been around much, have you?”

Heinrich’s humiliated anger returned. “I’ve been around. I was in the army, you know. The 11th Bavarian Infantry.”

Roehm stopped laughing. “Really? You seem a bit young.”

“Well I’m not! I just didn’t know these guys were Jews, that’s all.”

Roehm took one of his hands from the wheel and slapped Heinrich on the shoulder. “You’re all right, Heinrich. I can tell. You’ll like the fellows in my club. No Jews.”

“Good,” Himmler said, feeling better. “They make me nervous.”

As Ernst Roehm had said, the members of the Reichskriegsflagge were just regular guys, and quite a few were ex-soldiers. Since Heinrich was personally recruited by the president of the club, and formerly of the 11th Bavarian Infantry, he was given automatic acceptance. There was a lot of talk about the war and the surrender and the “November Criminals,” which all caused righteous indignation among the membership that

Heinrich felt very much a part of. They discussed the various kinds of drills they'd done, and would do again soon out near the shooting range when the weather improved. And then, out of the clear blue, Roehm announced to the fifty-odd men that since Heinrich was so skilled in the use of firearms, and was quite knowledgeable on military matters, he would be commissioned into the Reichskriegsflagge as a corporal.

For an instant Heinrich thought that all of the other fellows would now resent him, being a brand-new member and already commissioned, but instead they all looked at him with admiration. Heinrich smiled, feeling exultant, and Roehm gave him a reassuring nod.

Heinrich arrived promptly at 7:30 P.M. on Wednesday for his meeting with the Apollo Club. Once again he found all twenty-five members already there and seated at the same table.

"Well, if it isn't our newest member," said the man with the beard.

"It's very nice to see you, Heinrich," Dr. Ofner said with a smile. "Are you prepared to hold forth?"

"No."

There was a loud general moan as though the entire evening had been based on him saying yes and was now ruined.

"But why not?" the doctor inquired.

Heinrich looked at all their swarthy faces closely. How many here were Germans and how many were Jews? Obviously, this Dr. Abraham Ofner was a Jew, and the fellow with the beard because he was wearing one of those Jew skullcaps (why didn't I notice that before, he reproached himself). The fellow without an arm was clearly a German.

"I didn't understand what kind of club this was," Heinrich said.

"What kind do you mean?" asked a man with a square chin. "We are sponsored by the university."

Heinrich stood at the end of the table. "That's not what I mean."

"Then what?"

"It doesn't matter. I don't care to be a member of your club."

"But you already are," Ofner reminded him.

"No, I'm not!" Heinrich declared. "You've tried to fool me, but I'm not so easily duped. I was in the army, you know."

The man with only one arm lifted his mug. "Tell us about it."

"Well," Heinrich began, "I was with the 11th Bav— No! I'll have no more to do with you!"

"But why?" Ofner asked, honestly interested.

"That's for me to know!"

There was a momentary silence among the Apollo Club membership, an unusual occurrence. Suddenly, they all burst out in raucous laughter.

Heinrich stomped out of the beer hall cringing with loathing and hatred.

Karl was on duty in the front lobby of the Munich University Hospital administering triage and any immediate medical attention he could offer. The hospital was sorely understaffed, forcing Karl to attempt procedures that he had only watched or read about. Many times Karl was reticent about trying something new, but since there were so few doctors

available it was necessary for him to do whatever he could before a doctor arrived. It was a terrific learning experience, though rather tense for the medical students.

This week Karl was on the 6:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. shift, and with a half hour to go he was eagerly awaiting his relief. The lobby was momentarily quiet so he ducked into the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face. He looked in the mirror and noticed that the circles under his eyes were dark, and the creases in his forehead were becoming rather pronounced. He gave his face one more cold splash, clutched the edge of the sink for a moment to steady himself, blinked several times, took a deep breath, then headed back to the lobby.

Just as he stepped out the bathroom door three people came in through the main big oak doors: a mid-20s Jewish couple on either side of an elderly Jewish man with a black beard streaked with gray and curls dangling in front of his ears. He was hemorrhaging profusely from his head in rhythmic spurts, blood pouring down his face, into his beard and all over his coat. Karl dashed over and got the old man seated. The young

couple were in tears. Karl quickly attempted to stanch the bleeding with a compression bandage.

"My hat," the wounded man muttered. "Where is my hat?"

"It's gone, papa," the young woman informed him through her sobbing.

Karl held the bandage as tightly as he could to the old man's head. "What happened?"

"Papa was on his way home from synagogue when a whole group of those brown-shirts beat him up. They hit him with clubs. He never did anything to them or anyone else. They just beat him because he was a Jew." Her husband put his arm around his wife pulling her close.

Karl looked all around, but there wasn't a doctor in sight. He turned to the young man. "Hold this compress against his head as tightly as you can without hurting him, I'll get a doctor."

The young man nodded, taking hold of the bandage. Karl ran up the hall.

As he came around the corner he found Dr. Dietrich heading his way.

"Doctor," Karl said, catching his breath. "There's a man who needs immediate attention."

"All right, Karl. I'm coming."

Dr. Dietrich stepped up to the injured man. "This Jew? He'll be all right, you've stopped the bleeding. He looked around and saw a heavyset woman on a gurney. "I'll take her next."

Karl shook his head. "Her leg is sprained, it's not even broken. She can wait, Doctor. This man might have a fractured skull."

"I don't think so, bring in the woman."

"But Dr. Dietrich . . ." Karl pleaded.

Dietrich stepped up to Karl and put his hand on his shoulder. "Isn't your shift almost over?"

"Well, yes, but Luden's not here yet."

"Go home. I'll find someone to take care of your duties until he arrives."

"But . . ."

The doctor pushed him toward the door. “Go on.” He then turned to an orderly and said, “Bring in that woman,” then turned and left.

Karl felt helpless. He saw his coat hanging by the door, then turned back to the elderly Jewish man who had bled right through the bandage. Karl went over, unwrapped the soaked bandage and began to apply another one. The young woman was sobbing deeply. Her husband turned to Karl.

“Thank you for trying, sir. I’m sure they’ll get to him next.”

The old man was deathly pale and losing consciousness. Karl looked up at the young man standing over him, then to the crying woman, then ran up the hall to the operating room where Dr. Dietrich was working on the heavy woman’s leg.

“Excuse me, doctor,” Karl said. “The man in the lobby with the head injury is in serious condition. I believe that he may be dying.”

Dr. Dietrich looked up in a foul humor. “I thought I told you to go home?”

“The man may be dying, doctor.”

"People die in the hospital every day, Karl. It's a fact of life."

Karl almost couldn't speak. "But this man might not have to die now if you would just see him right away."

"But I won't until I'm done here and the longer you detain me the longer it will be until I see him."

Dr. Dietrich went back to the woman's sprained ankle.

Defeated, Karl walked slowly back to the front lobby. The new bandage he had just applied was now soaked through with blood. The old man had lost consciousness and the younger man continued to press the worthless bandage against his lolling head.

Just then Hans Luden, Karl's replacement, walked in.

"Hi, Karl, what's going on?"

"Hans," Karl said desperately,"keep an eye on this man and make sure he's the next patient the doctor sees."

"All right," replied Hans hanging up his coat, entirely unconcerned.

Karl hesitantly took his coat and opened the door. The younger Jewish man gave him a pained smile, but Karl couldn't conjure up a smile in return.

Having graduated from Munich Technical College, Heinrich now desperately needed a job so he could stay on his own. In the many, many letters that he and his mother exchanged, she constantly begged him to return home. Of the many things Heinrich might do, returning home wasn't one of them. However, having a degree in agriculture made it virtually impossible to find a job in Munich.

Several weeks later, when the money his mother sent him was nearly gone, and Heinrich was on the edge of destitution and panic, he found an ad in the newspaper for a lab assistant in Schleissheim. That was fifteen miles north of the city, which was a bit far, but if he got the job he'd work something out.

Heinrich awoke early the next day and with the last money he had he took the train to Schleissheim. A man at the station told him the factory

was about a mile up the road, so he started walking. It was a beautiful late summer day and the farmland around him shimmered in the bright sunlight, the sweet refreshing smells of straw and manure wafting by. As he kept walking the odors grew stronger until he could no longer smell the straw, just the manure. Heinrich reached the address he was seeking and found that it was the Stickstoff-Land-Embs fertilizer factory.

As fate would have it, he got the job. He liked it, too. He made sixteen marks a week and the lab workers were accorded a respect that was not given to the factory workers.

After two month of taking the train Heinrich saved enough money to buy a secondhand Swedish motorbike—something he'd always wanted. Gasoline was quite expensive but he was still saving money in the long run not taking the train, plus he could now easily get out to the shooting range for the Rifle Club meetings.

He also made a friend at the factory named Rudolph Hess. They met one day after work when Hess was handing out leaflets explaining why good Germans should hate the Jews. Heinrich had never realized that the

Jews were behind so much wrongdoing, or that they controlled all of the wealth in Europe. He recalled his father referring to those "damn Jews" occasionally, but he'd never paid much attention.

Hess was a tall, strapping, brooding twenty-eight-year-old man with thick, wavy black hair, bushy black eyebrows that connected at the center, and always appeared to need a shave, even when he'd just shaved. He was a member of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and was a war buddy and close acquaintance of the party chairman, Adolf Hitler. Hess and Heinrich began spending time together after work. Hess would go on and on about the "Jewish question" and how the National Socialists were growing in power and prestige daily. He also discussed his war experiences on the Eastern Front where he won an Iron Cross, second class, and his exotic childhood experiences growing up in Alexandria, Egypt. Heinrich found Hess fascinating and wished that he too could be a Nazi.

Chapter Seven

1923

Helga decided that now that Karl was in his final semester of medical school it was the perfect time to conceive a child. Karl heartily agreed, although with his classes, the reading, working at the hospital, working at the beer hall at night, *and* Helga working ten hours a day, there wasn't as much time as they both would have liked to devote to the effort.

Karl was just finding himself asleep more and more often these days. He never remembered falling asleep, just waking up and finding himself sitting in class, or seven stops past where he wanted to go on the streetcar, or lying on one of the hard benches at the Buergerbraukeller. One of his fellow cleaners always made sure to wake him before Mr. Altschuler arrived at dawn, not that he would have really minded—he liked Karl and understood his situation. When Karl was on night duty at the hospital it was always perfectly all right with Mr. Altschuler that Karl take off work; that's why he was able to stick with the job so long, not to mention the free

meals that he and Helga got every week (not once a month as he'd initially been informed).

It was November 8th. Only six more weeks until Karl graduated and began his internship. And then he could sleep until 1930 if he wanted to. As he walked home from the hospital shortly after 8:00 P.M., Karl sensed something strange occurring. Some streets had traffic tie-ups, while others were totally vacant. Something was disrupting the natural rhythms of the city, although what it was he wasn't yet able to discern. The oddness of the evening, combined with sleep deprivation, made him feel silly and slightly light-headed, and before he even knew what he was doing he had spent almost all of his money on a big bottle of white wine.

Helga was waiting for him in their little room at the Goldmans' with dinner prepared. Karl hid the bottle of wine behind his back and entered grinning.

"Hello, dear."

She set the book she was reading on the table. “Hello. What are you so happy about?”

“Oh, nothing,” Karl said, sauntering over. “Let’s have some wine.” He placed the bottle before her. “I know, I know—it was too expensive and we can’t afford it, but so what. You only live once.”

Helga arose, shoving her face right into his. “If you think I’m going to complain you’re wrong. Actually, you read my mind.” She took the bottle, got a corkscrew and opened it. Karl brought two glasses that had once been Mrs. Goldman’s religious candles and Helga poured them each a large glass full.

“To you, my beautiful wife.”

“And to you, my strong handsome husband. May the rest of our lives be as happy as we are right now.”

They touched glasses and each took a big sip.

“Well, men!” Ernst Roehm boomed to the two hundred Reichskriegsflagge members sitting in front of him in the university

gymnasium. “The reason I called this emergency meeting is regarding the big march we’re to be involved in with the Nazis on Friday. It’s been changed to tonight, but there’s one thing . . .” Roehm hoisted his big burly body from his chair, his knee-high black leather boots creaking as he strode before them. “. . . This is not just another march, this is the real thing. Tonight we take over the government!”

The entire membership burst into excited chatter all at once. Heinrich sat in the front row of the bleachers, his rifle and pack between his legs. So this was it. He was finally going to see some action, go into battle, possibly taste blood—perhaps his own. His mouth went dry and his palms began to sweat.

“Hitler has got the army and General Erich von Ludendorff—the man who commanded many of us on the Western Front—as well as the Bund Oberland and the Kampfbund, all on our side, so there shouldn’t be any problem at all. There will assuredly be no problems with the Reichskriegsflagge! We are the best of the lot, men, and that’s why we got the most difficult assignment—we are to storm and take control of the War

Ministry. Our mission is crucial, and success will completely depend on us and how we perform. Are there any questions?" There were none. Roehm picked up his rifle. "All right then, rank and file! Let's move!"

The Reichskriegsflagge, with Roehm at the front and Himmler directly behind him holding their banner, then the two hundred others carrying every conceivable type of rifle and pistol, marched through the still night streets of Munich at double time. They took a route determined early by Roehm that would keep them away from the crowds and hopefully any policeman as well. So far they had not seen either one. Heinrich wasn't sure what they would do if per chance they did see a policeman. Shoot him? Take him prisoner, most likely. This was the real thing. However, as they marched up the cobblestones, their heavy-booted footfalls resounding loudly off the brick buildings, it felt less and less real by the second. They turned a corner and encountered their first pedestrians, all of whom stopped dead in their tracks, except a few who

ducked into nearby doorways. The revolutionary soldiers marched right on past.

When they were halfway there, having gone just over a mile, Heinrich's legs began to cramp. Damn! I've got to start exercising more. If this gets bad enough I could mess up the whole thing. He squinted back the pain and continued marching at double time.

Their route intentionally took them as far away from the Buergerbraukeller as possible. That was where Hitler was negotiating his terms. As they came within twenty blocks of it they could hear the commotion. There must have been thousands of people over there, not to mention the cacophony of ringing police bells approaching from various directions. The entire experience was unearthly. But what power this was! To be at the forefront of a major revolution; this was the place to be! Heinrich could feel it in every fiber of his body. He was no longer in some stinking latrine trench shoveling shit! He was right at the front where he was meant to be.

As they entered the Marienplatz the Reichskriegsflagge soldiers encountered a crowd of about seventy-five people listening to the exhortations of a shockingly ugly man with a bald head and a huge fleshy neck that sagged over his collar. He was in the midst of defaming the Jews, but stopped cold when he saw the fast-moving soldiers approaching. The whole crowd turned and watched as the soldiers marched past.

Cutting down the narrow Residenzstrasse, past the Feldherrnhalle, the soldiers came out into the vast open Odeonsplatz across which reposed the War Ministry.

The few pedestrians crossing the Odeonsplatz at that moment heard the unmistakable and greatly amplified thunder of two hundred quickly marching jackbooted soldiers and hastily got out of the way.

When they reached the stone steps of the War Ministry, Ernst Roehm let out a bellowing war cry that was immediately taken up by all the others, as they stormed inside. Easily subduing the two guards at the front doors without injuring either of them, Roehm stuck the barrel of his rifle into the face of the guard at the front desk.

"We of the Reichskriegsflagge take control of this building! Any defiance or subversion will result in immediate execution!" Roehm turned to his men and barked, "Spread out! Check all of the offices and bring all prisoners here! Corporal Himmler, you and your squad stay with me."

It was a few minutes past 9:00 P.M. and the War Ministry was theirs.

"Corporal Himmler," Roehm ordered. "Send one of your men back to the Buergerbraukeller with the message, 'The War Ministry has been taken without resistance and the forces of the Reichskriegsflagge intend to hold it until further instruction has been received.'"

Himmler turned to the man behind him. "Private Betzel, did you get that message?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then move out!"

Roehm secured the building, placing guards at all doors and windows, lookouts on the roof and a contingent of twenty men guarding their twelve prisoners—and then the wait began. As it was planned, the

Nazis and the Kampfbund were supposed to be arriving at the War Ministry any moment. A young private ran up and saluted.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to Roehm.

"Yes, Private?"

"One of the lookouts on the roof has spotted Private Betzel running up the street."

Roehm smiled. "Thank you, Private. He's relaying a message for me. Return to your position."

The private saluted, turned and left.

Ten minutes later Private Betzel came running up the high stone steps, entered the building past the guards and stopped in front of Roehm and Himmler, huffing and puffing, unable to catch his breath. He tried to speak, but emitted nothing but a dry gasp.

Roehm handed him a canteen of water. "Catch your breath, son."

Betzel took a sip of water and did as he was told. Ernst Roehm took out a pouch of tobacco and began rolling a cigarette. He offered the fixings to Heinrich but he declined.

Private Betzel, a thin, gangly youth, began to speak haltingly. “There are thousands and thousands of people outside the beer hall, sir. Every policeman in the city is there and the Nazis have a machine gun set up in the doorway.”

“Were you able to get through?” Roehm asked excitedly. Heinrich felt an electric charge in the air.

“Oh, yes,” Betzel said. “And Hitler was very pleased with what we have accomplished. He was very happy about everything. Premier von Kahr, General von Lossow and Police Chief von Seisser have all declared loyalty to him and the only shots fired so far were from Hitler himself, just to get everyone to quiet down. Everything seems to be going right on schedule, sir, although I did hear just as I was leaving that a detachment of the Bund Oberland was having a skirmish with Reichswehr soldiers near the engineer’s barracks. It seemed like Hitler and Goering were going to go there themselves to evaluate the situation.”

“But what of us?” Roehm asked.

“We’re supposed to await further orders.”

"That's fine," Roehm declared, slapping Betzel on the back. "Lossow, Seisser *and* Kahr, that's just fine! Private, go back to the beer hall and at the first word of anything report back here."

"Yes, sir," said Betzel turning and dashing out of the building.

"Corporal Himmler."

"Yes, sir," Himmler said.

"Send a man to the army engineer barracks and let's find out what's going on there."

"Yes, sir." Himmler turned to a short muscular soldier beside him.

"Khroeler, do you know where the army engineer barracks is?"

"Yes, sir," Private Khroeler replied.

"Then move out."

Lighting his cigarette, Ernst Roehm sat down and mused. "Hitler shouldn't have let the momentum go. He should have marched straight here as planned. Ah well . . ." He slapped his barrel chest, his cigarette dangling from his lips. "We've done what we were supposed to do. Now it's all up to Hitler."

Thirty minutes later Private Betzel returned, sweat soaking his uniform, and stepped up to Commander Roehm. “Sir,” said Betzel, his chest heaving, “the moment after I got back General von Lossow left the beer hall, then Kahr and Seisser left, too. No one there has any idea what’s happening and Adolf Hitler hasn’t returned yet.”

Roehm turned to Himmler, shaking his head despairingly. “I told you, he should never have left. All right, Betzel, back to the beer hall.”

“Yes, sir.”

Betzel departed just as Private Khroeler arrived in a sweat, but smiling. “The Bund Oberland overran the engineer barracks, sir.”

“*Ha!*” Roehm bellowed. “Of all the stupid idiotic things! What in the world do we want a barracks for?”

“I don’t know,” Khroeler continued, no longer smiling. “But Hitler looked very pleased.”

“That’s fine! I’m glad to know he’s pleased! We’ve taken the goddamn War Ministry and he’s out supervising the capture of an

engineer's barracks! While all the government support sneaks out the back door! Good work, Adolf!"

Suddenly Private Betzel was back again. "Excuse me, sir."

"That was awfully fast," Roehm remarked.

"I never got there, sir."

"And why not?" demanded Commander Roehm, still in a lather.

"The army has the building surrounded, sir."

"*What!?*"

Roehm, with Himmler in tow, dashed to the door and found over one hundred Reichswehr soldiers in the midst of surrounding the building. Reinforcements were arriving steadily in groups of four.

Slamming the door, Roehm turned and bellowed, "Not one shot shall be fired! Pass the word immediately! I don't care if they begin firing on us, no one returns fire!"

Heinrich couldn't believe what he was hearing. "But why?"

"Why?" Roehm proclaimed vehemently. "Because I would rather not be shot for treason, and I would rather not see all of you shot, either."

"Treason?" Himmler repeated incredulously. "What are you talking about? We've taken over the government."

"Have we? Then what are all those soldiers doing out there?"

Heinrich was speechless.

Roehm and Himmler moved to the high roof of the War Ministry. From this vantage point, four stories up, they could easily see the now nearly two hundred soldiers surrounding them, all armed, in position and ready. And more soldiers continued to stream in. From their new position they could also see the entire Odeonsplatz. And here on the roof Heinrich Himmler and twenty other Reichskriegsflagge soldiers sat waiting for the remainder of the night—watching, smoking cigarettes and listening to their commander curse.

When the sun rose the Reichskriegsflagge was still in control of the War Ministry and Ernst Roehm was fit to be tied. "Why haven't they attacked? Told us to surrender? *Anything?*"

All that had occurred was that more reinforcements had continually arrived until there were at five hundred Reichswehr soldiers encircling

them. And they hadn't even bothered to ask for the hostage guards. There had been no communication whatsoever.

"What in the name of God is happening?" Roehm muttered.

By 9:00 A.M. there were over seven hundred Reichswehr soldiers surrounding the War Ministry and still nothing had happened. All of Roehm's men were starting to fall apart due to the strain and tension. In fear that one of them might begin shooting just for the sake of some action, Roehm had had all of them unload their weapons and turn the ammunition over to him. This order was met with quite a bit of disgruntled animosity from many of the men who were just itching to fight.

Then, at 10:00 A.M., a runner approached the commander of the Reichswehr. A moment later a contingent of one hundred soldiers moved out of line and began double-timing across the Odeonsplatz toward the Residenzstrasse. Something was finally happening, but what? Roehm and Himmler both took out their field glasses and followed the departing

soldiers to the mouth of the street where they were met by about fifty policemen in the midst of erecting a blockade.

"Well," Roehm said morosely, "Hitler and his men are finally on their way here—now how are they going to get past that blockade? There was no blockade last night."

Himmler seemed puzzled. "If the government's been turned over to him, shouldn't they just let him through?"

"Heinrich," said Roehm thoroughly exasperated, "if they were just going to let him through, why in the world would they block off the street in the first place?"

"But—"

"But nothing! There is no way he can get past all those soldiers and policemen, not on a street that narrow, and not unless he's bringing artillery. The point wasn't to fight the military; it was to get them to join us. That obviously didn't happen. Once Kahr and Von Lussow sneaked away, this revolution was over."

"Then what will become of us?" Heinrich asked.

Roehm shrugged. “Prison, I suppose.”

Heinrich couldn’t believe it. He was aghast. “Prison? Oh, no . . .”

“Oh, yes. This is treason and by law we *should* all be shot, but I think there are too many of us for that. Maybe they’ll just shoot Hitler, Goering and me.”

As if to illustrate Roehm’s point about prison, two trucks pulled up in front of the War Ministry and soldiers began unloading rolls of barbed wire which they then unspooled around the building.

Just then one of the men on the roof with a spyglass hollered, “*There they are!*”

Himmler and Roehm raised their field glasses and watched as a large crowd bearing a swastika banner marched down the Residenzstrasse. Due to the narrowness of the street, the horde of approaching revolutionaries were ten men wide, but endlessly long.

“They’ve made it this far,” Heinrich declared, his spirits rising. “Maybe they can make it all the way!”

Roehm sighed. “Anything is possible.”

They all watched eagerly as the Nazi procession halted at the roadblock. The front line consisted of Adolf Hitler, Hermann Goering, Rudolph Hess, Hitler's bodyguard Ulrich Graf, General Erich von Ludendorff, his aide Major Streck, and a Russian, Max von Scheubner-Richter, all arm-in-arm, facing many army and police rifles leveled at them. Hitler disengaged one of his arms and pulled out his pistol. There was a long moment as Hitler and the police commander exchanged words, then Hitler's pistol flashed. Suddenly there was a massive volley of police and army weapon fire and the entire front line of Nazis fell to the ground as the rest quickly scattered—all except General Ludendorff and Major Streck who walked directly through the police cordon and into the Odeonsplatz. Unfortunately, nobody followed. Within minutes all that remained of the Nazi revolution were a few dead and wounded bodies. Hitler, Goering and Hess were long gone. Ludendorff and Streck were immediately arrested. A soldier at the blockade ran over to the War Ministry and spoke to the commanding officer. For the first time since the Reichswehr soldiers surrounded the building, the commander called out to Roehm and his men.

"Surrender now! This putsch is over and your leader, Hitler, has abandoned you! You have exactly one minute for your commander to come out unarmed and surrender or we will be forced to use gas!"

Heinrich was frightened as he watched Ernst Roehm dejectedly put his field glasses away, toss his pistol onto the roof and start down the ladder. All of his men silently watched him descend.

Roehm opened the front door, stepped outside, raised his hands over his head and stepped forward. Several soldiers ran up to him brandishing rifles in his face, frisked him and took his cartridge belt. Brusquely, the Reichskriegsflagge commander was hauled away.

The Reichswehr commander now called out to the rest of the scared, tense, failed revolutionaries. "Now, all the rest of you will drop all of your weapons and slowly file out in an orderly fashion with your hands raised!"

Heinrich turned to the other men on the roof to see what they would do. Somewhere deep inside he was hoping that one of them would just start firing and a big battle would ensue, thus saving them all the humiliation of going to prison. On the other hand, Heinrich was also

frightened that one of these hardened ex-soldiers might just do exactly that and then they would all be killed.

One by one all of the men dropped their rifles, unhitched their cartridge belts and started toward the ladder. Sadly, Heinrich looked at his prized carbine, then gently set it down. He took off his belt and followed the others to the punishment that awaited below.

It took fifteen minutes for all two hundred of them to file out and Heinrich made sure that he was the very last. As he reached the front door, there leaning against the wall was the Nazi banner he had carried so proudly the night before. Without a second thought he grabbed it and carried it with him out the door of the War Ministry. When he reached the barbed wire a newspaper photographer took his picture. The next second a soldier grabbed the banner from him and tossed it on the ground.

Heinrich Himmler holds the Reichskriegsflagge flag
at the Beer Hall Putsch, November 8th, 1923

To the Reichskriegsflagge membership's great surprise they were not arrested. They were not even taken to the police headquarters. Instead, they were given a long lecture informing them that they could have been executed or imprisoned for their treasonous offense. Then they were let go.

An hour after their surrender they found themselves wandering out of the Odeonsplatz, their cause shattered, their movement halted, with only their daily lives left to deal with. And then a major realization struck Heinrich—"I haven't shown up for work in two days. I'm in trouble."

Karl awoke feeling fine and refreshed, even if the day was gray and overcast.

Day!

"Oh my God!" Karl gasped, grabbing the clock and bringing it to his face. 9:50 in the morning! He was supposed to be at work at 2:00 AM. No wonder he felt so good; he'd just overslept by eight hours. His shift at the hospital was starting in ten minutes and he was still in bed. Helga woke up, looked around bleary-eyed for a second, then came to the same realization.

"Oh dear, you're late for work."

"I missed work, and there's no way I can get to the hospital on time." He dropped back against the pillow and grabbed Helga. "I'm already late, what's a few more minutes, right?"

Helga happily snuggled up against him. "You'd better stop at work on your way to the hospital and explain what happened to Mr. Altschuler."

"And say what? My wife and I got drunk, made love all night, and then we fell into such a deep sleep that I didn't make it in? I think I'll just lie instead."

"What will you say?"

"I haven't decided yet. Something outrageous, like I was caught in a coal mine disaster, or something like that."

Helga disappeared under the covers. "Do what you must—and so will I."

Karl sauntered up the street feeling better than he'd felt in a long time. Maybe Mr. Altschuler would be mad, but he wouldn't fire him—at least he didn't think so. Ah, well, he felt much too good to worry about it.

When he arrived at the Buergerbraukeller, Karl found four policemen standing outside holding rifles, and all around them litter and debris was strewn all over the street. One policeman stepped forward blocking Karl's path.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Into the beer hall," Karl said.

"Why?"

"I work here. I clean up."

The policeman burst out laughing and turned to the others. "This is the guy that cleans this place up." All of the other policemen burst out laughing, too.

"What happened?" Karl asked.

The policeman nearest him set down his rifle and wiped his eyes.

"I'm sorry about that, I didn't mean to laugh at you."

"That's all right, what happened?"

"The Nazis tried to overthrow the government last night, but we stopped them," the policeman stated proudly.

"Good work. Is it okay if I go inside?"

"Go right ahead."

Within, Karl found Mr. and Mrs. Altschuler in the midst of an argument.

"No more!" bellowed the formidable, 250-pound woman picking up broken glass off the floor and dropping it into a trash bin. "No more political groups! I won't have it! Look at this mess!"

Karl did just that and it was a sorry sight. The interior of the beer hall was demolished: most of the chairs and tables were on their sides, some of the thick oak tables were actually split in half, all the pictures were knocked off the walls, several paintings had tears in the canvas, two of the walls had automobile tire-sized holes in them, the ceiling had bullet holes in it, and garbage and broken bottles and mugs were everywhere. Karl got a trashcan and began filling it with plaster from the ceiling.

"Everything is political now!" Mr. Altschuler retorted as he shoveled part of his walls into a can. "People don't just get together, drink beer and sing songs anymore. Now they all want revolutions! Communists, Socialists, Fascists. They all give me a big pain! But, for better or worse, *they* are our clientele, my dear!" Mr. and Mrs. Altschuler finally turned and noticed Karl for the first time.

Mr. Altschuler waved his hand around the room. "So, Karl, what do you think of this?"

Karl shook his head. "I'm glad I missed it."

"He's glad he missed it," Mrs. Altschuler remarked. "They had a machine gun set up in our doorway and had us caged up here all night like animals with thousands of these, *Nazis*"—she said the name with distaste—"these brown-shirt barbarians. If you ask me this is all going to come to no good."

"You think everything is going to come to no good," her husband said. "We've got a good business here."

"To earn what? These worthless deutsche marks? You use these for wiping your *tuches*. You mark my words, Morris, there's going to be another pogrom. We should get out of this country while we still have a chance. Go to America with my sister."

Mr. Altschuler dropped his shovel and sighed. "Maybe you're right. Maybe it would just be cheaper to sell the place, eh Karl? Then you wouldn't have to help clean up."

"I'm sorry to say," Karl informed him, "that I can't stay much longer. I've got to get to the hospital where I'm already late. I can be back about 8:00."

"Don't bother," said his boss. "We'll clean it another day."

"What do you mean?" his wife asked.

"I mean we'll be closed a few days. So what? We'll take a vacation."

Mrs. Altschuler was in shock. "Morris, what's come over you?"

"I feel like throwing a revolution. I'm on strike."

She looked at him for a long moment, then dropped her garbage can with a clang. "Sure. What's the difference? Karl, why don't you take some food from the kitchen. Better you should have it then let it spoil."

"Thank you," Karl said. "Helga will be very happy."

"Here, let me show you." She headed into the kitchen.

Karl looked at Mr. Altschuler and didn't recognize his expression.

Bewildered frightened amusement, perhaps. He slowly turned to Karl. "So, *nu*, the world's gone *meshuga*. Go get some food while it's free."

Two days later Adolf Hitler was arrested. He spent the next ten months imprisoned in reasonably luxurious quarters in the Landsberg Castle where he dictated his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, to Rudolph Hess. With a badly wounded leg, Hermann Goering and his Swedish wife were spirited out of the country. Goering began using morphine for the pain and quickly became addicted. Ernst Roehm was sentenced to six months in Stadelheim Prison. The Russian, Max von Scheubner-Richter died of bullet wounds. Heinrich Himmler was fired from his job at the fertilizer factory.

Chapter Eight

1924-1929

The astronomical inflation was finally curbed with the introduction of the rentenmark on October 15th, 1923. Since there was no gold to back the rentenmark, it was backed by mortgaged land and industrial goods. It was decided by the Deutsche Bank that a rentenmark was worth one trillion of the old papiermarks, equaling twenty-five American cents.

Karl graduated from the Munich Medical Academy third in his class. He and Helga bid the Goldmans and the Altschulers goodbye and returned to Landshut where they moved back in with Karl's father. Karl joined Alfred in his medical practice as a partner, quickly proving to be a skilled physician. For the most part Karl's experiences during the Great War were forgotten, and he and Helga quickly assimilated themselves into Landshut community life.

Helga's sister, Christine, married Martin Kroll, the Manns' next-door neighbor. Martin was three years older than Karl and was Landshut's one

and only professional auto mechanic, as well as the owner of the only petrol station. When Karl was thirteen Martin had given him his first motorcycle ride.

Heinrich decided he would no longer work at menial jobs, but would instead dedicate himself to politics. He begged money constantly from his mother, and with his motorbike made some more money as a messenger for a variety of radical political groups. He also visited Ernst Roehm several times a week in prison, bringing him newspapers and food. He made yet a bit more money charging other prisoners for the same service.

When Roehm was released from prison upon the completion of his six-month sentence, he and Himmler joined the Volkisch Movement, along with other former Nazis, General Ludendorff, Gregor and Otto Strasser, and Alfred Rosenberg. When Hitler was released from prison he reestablished the Nazi Party and absorbed the Volkisch Movement into it. Heinrich became the party organizer for Lower Bavaria and was paid thirty-five rentenmarks per week (which were now commonly referred to

simply marks). Five months later Heinrich was promoted to District Leader. Struggling novelist, Joseph Goebbels, the intense, sharp-featured fellow with oddly spaced teeth and a clubfoot, joined the Nazi Party and he and Himmler became friends. Scheming to get ahead in the party, Goebbels and Himmler suggested to Hitler that a list be drawn up of all the Jews in Germany and all of their Christian friends, which would include millions of names. Hitler promptly ignored the idea.

When Karl and Helga were really beginning to get worried that they might not be able to have a child, Helga became pregnant. She gave birth to a seven-and-a-half pound boy whom they named Gunther after Helga's grandfather.

The Nazis had two different divisions of soldiers: the Sturmabteilungen, or S.A., the brown-shirted storm troopers that numbered nearly five thousand in 1926, commanded by Ernst Roehm; and the Schutzstaffel, or S.S., who were Adolf Hitler's personal guard that wore

black uniforms patterned after Mussolini's black Italian Fascist uniforms. In 1926 the S.S. numbered just over one hundred men and was under the command of Erhard Heiden, a former police stool pigeon. Heinrich Himmler was promoted to Deputy Leader of the S.S.

Several months later Heinrich met a wealthy Polish nurse named Margarete Concerzowo who owned a fancy nursing home. She was seven years older than Heinrich and was consumed with the idea of treating diseases with drugs that would cause a healthy person to contract that disease. She was also deeply interested in mesmerism, herbalism and ancient Teutonic religions, all of which now became Heinrich's main interests, too. She introduced Heinrich to a man named Walther Darre, an expert in ancient Teutonic religions, who convinced Heinrich that he was the reincarnation of King Heinrich the First, a monarch who ruled Germany from 919 to 936 A.D.

In 1928 Heinrich and Margarete were married and the same year she gave birth to a daughter whom they named Gudrun. They sold the nursing home and with the money purchased a chicken farm in Waldtrudering, a

small town outside Munich. Heinrich's dream of being a farmer were finally going to come true.

In 1929 Heinrich was put in charge of the Schutzstaffel. His title was Reichsfuhrer S.S.

Rogue's Gallery

Heinrich Himmler age seven.

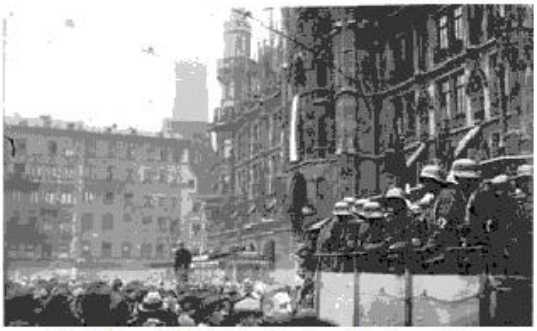
Himmler as *oberfuhrer*, or corporal, 1923.

Adolf Hitler during WWI.

Ernst Roehm, early 1920s.

Rudolph Hess, mid-1920s.

Hermann Goering, early 1920s.



The Beer Hall Putsch, the Marienplatz, Munich.

Joseph Mengele before 1945.

Mein Kampf, First Edition.

Part Two

1933-1945

Chapter Nine

March, 1933

Dr. Karl Mann was thirty-four years old, had been happily married for fifteen years and had an eight-year-old son. He was regular churchgoer and a respected member of the community. He had no enemies in town. His former friend Gebhard had moved away many years before and never wrote to his parents.

Walter Hossbach bought the little newspaper in Landshut where he had once worked and now published an extremely radical communist paper written mainly by himself. Walter's wife, Erika, and Helga became good friends and the Manns spent many evenings with the Hossbachs and the Krolls from next door talking, laughing, and playing bridge. The Krolls' son, Hermann, was Gunther Mann's best friend. And life moved along smoothly for most of the residents of Landshut.

The Nazi Party had become the largest and strongest political power in Germany. At 12:00 P.M. on January 30th, Reich President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor.

On February 1st, Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsfuhrer S.S., and his second-in-command, Reinhard Heydrich, were driven to Landshut in a brand-new Mercedes-Benz limousine, followed by four other Mercedes limos full of lesser-ranked S.S. officers, for a victory celebration and parade. Heinrich wore his own personally designed black S.S. uniform with knee-high black leather boots, a skull insignia on the cap, and a sword on his belt. All of the other S.S. officers' uniforms merely had daggers.

Reinhard Heydrich, thought Himmler, was no one to spend an extended amount of time with in a confined space, as he was now forced to listen to Heydrich's endless diatribe on the "Jewish problem," which, though he agreed, was painfully wearisome after a while. The Jews would be dealt with soon enough. Right now the internal structure of the S.S. had to be dealt with, and, as always, it was going to be entirely up to Heinrich to do all of the work. Not that he minded, certainly not—it was for the

Fuhrer and the Fatherland. And Heydrich was a tireless worker and totally ruthless, a trait Himmler deeply admired, but my God, what a bore! It was really too bad, too, because Reinhard Heydrich was the only high-ranking Nazi who actually looked Aryan: tall, well-built, severely chiseled features, blond hair and blue eyes. His only major problem was that he had the most Jewish blood of any of them, or at least that's what *he* seemed to think. Himmler had created one section of the S.S. that did nothing else but run genealogy charts on almost everyone back to 1750. In comparison to most Nazi officers, including himself and Hitler, Heydrich's chart didn't look so bad. Obviously, he knew something that the S.S. genealogists had yet to uncover. Between his blatant guilt and his endless pontification, Heydrich was nearly unbearable. And, as Himmler had realized early on, a perfect tool.

When the limousines reached the center of town a massive cheer went up from the Landshut Nazi membership, which numbered three thousand, nearly half the population. There were Nazi party members, S.A.

brown-shirts, the Hitler Youth, and the S.S. all awaiting Himmler and Heydrich's arrival. The cheering roared as the cars crept slowly past.

"Do you hear that!?" Heydrich exclaimed. "Now *we* have the power! And we can rid the world of the Jewish Bolshevik pestilence once and for all!"

Heinrich said nothing, nor showed any emotion. With his face drawn back, his double chins shoved forward, his soft veiny hands resting on top of one another on his crossed knee, he let the cheering wash over and through him. I'll make the S.S. the strongest force in the Reich, then *I'll* be the most powerful man in Germany, then the world. I just have to watch out for Heydrich . . . and Boorman . . . and Goering . . . and Goebbels . . . and Roehm . . . ah yes, Ernst Roehm, his old Reichskriegsflagge commander. Soon after joining the S.S., when Heinrich had discovered that Roehm was a perverted homosexual, his respect for the man had completely vanished. And now he was a problem. Himmler's S.S. numbered less than fifty thousand while Roehm's S.A. numbered nearly half a million unruly, undisciplined Jew-haters. Among them were

possibly ten percent that were worthwhile, potential S.S. men. The rest should just be put in the army, he thought. Whatever the case may be, Ernst Roehm was much too unbalanced and irresponsible to handle that much power and something would have to be done about it soon. Consolidation, that was the name of the game.

The ebullient cheering crowd formed a parade behind the long black limousines, and with Nazi banners held high, they all marched proudly through town. It was a triumphant homecoming for Heinrich Himmler and he felt well satisfied.

Karl and Alfred Mann spent the remainder of that day and half the night treating Landshut's small Jewish population of injuries sustained due to the Nazi political victory parade. Mainly the casualties consisted of broken jaws, noses and ribs, bruises from thrown rocks, and cuts sustained from broken flying glass. In the confusion quite a few people who were neither Jewish nor anti-Nazi got beaten up and injured as well.

It was a full day and night for the Manns, Helga, Christine, and the youngest sister, Marianne, all acting as nurses. Walter and Erika Hossbach and Father Grunner all helped as much as they could, too. When the last patient was treated and sent home, they all sat in the waiting room thoroughly exhausted, no one saying a word.

"Most of the Nazis are so young and vital," Father Grunner finally said. "If only they didn't have this credo of hatred for the Jews they might really help Germany."

Karl sadly shook his head. "Nothing like this can be any good for anyone."

"And they're not crazy about communists, either," Erika Hossbach pointed out to her husband. "So you might want to settle down a little bit, Walter."

Walter barked a loud laugh. "Like hell! Now I really begin. These Nazis are very obviously crackpots! Everyone with any sense at all is soon going to be looking for an alternative, and it's clearly Communism."

"That's fine, Walter," said Alfred. "Bad leaders have befallen Germany before and the German people have always persevered. This too shall pass." With that he rolled down his sleeves, rose to his feet and put on his jacket. "And now, unless anyone here is in dire need of medical attention, I would like to eat supper."

"There isn't any," Helga informed him.

"What? Why not?"

Helga laughed. "I don't suppose you recall, but I've been here all day working with you in the clinic."

"I know what," Karl said happily. "Let's go out to eat. Let's drink some beer. How does that sound?"

There was a general grunt of agreement.

Parting company with Father Grunner outside, they then walked to the Hofbrau. The beer hall was so jammed full of people that it caused Karl and his party to wait over a half an hour for a table, which had never happened before. When they were seated they all ordered beer. Most of the

revelers inside were Nazi Party members wearing swastika armbands. There were also several tables of S.A. men, as well as a large table of high-ranking S.S. officers around the corner in a somewhat isolated alcove. Once their beer arrived and they had ordered dinner, Walter took a long look around, then with a sigh heavily set down his mug.

"How did these Nazis get this far? Their doctrine of Aryan supremacy is so ludicrous that if it were applied to any of the Nazi leaders they'd all fail."

"Yes," Alfred agreed. "They want all Germans to look like Swedes."

"They're about to open a clinic in Munich," Karl said, "where they will be sterilizing people who they consider 'racially impure.'"

"*What!?*" Helga blurted, shocked.

At the S.S. table around the corner in the alcove, at the head of the table which put him nearest to the doorway into the main room, sat Heinrich Himmler, guest of honor. Every one of the S.S. men heartily drank beer, except Heinrich, who winced at the odor. A cup of tea sat before him growing cold. With his hands folded in his lap he placidly listened to the

many conversations going on at the table. A high-pitched woman's voice exclaiming, "*What!?*" caught his attention behind him.

"That's right," Karl continued. "Those whom the Nazis consider 'racially impure' will be sterilized. At this same clinic they'll perform mandatory abortions on women made pregnant by their S.S. that they consider 'bad breeding stock.'"

"No!" Marianne was aghast.

"Yes," said Karl. "That's exactly what it said—'bad breeding stock.' It was like reading a livestock journal instead of a medical journal. But worst of all, the Nazis intend to shorten the term of medical school to just two years. This they say will allow the Reich to have twice as many doctors in half the amount of time."

"Absurd!" his father declared. "What they'll get is twice as many incompetent doctors!"

Walter shook his head. "I can't believe it, that's incredible! Will you let me read that journal?"

"Of course," Karl said. "But it's going into effect immediately. The Nazis are obviously extremely determined in their insanity."

Heinrich Himmler leaned over to Reinhard Heydrich on his left.

"Can you see those people at the table behind me?"

Heydrich glanced to his right, then leaned toward his boss. "Yes."

"I want to know everything about all of them. Meet me at party headquarters in an hour."

"Yes, sir." Heydrich turned to the S.S. man beside him and relayed the order. A moment later half the table got up and left.

Himmler left a moment after that, never once glancing back.

Heydrich met Himmler right on time with all of the requested information in several files. Heydrich opened the uppermost file and began to read:

"Seated at the table were: Walter Hossbach, publisher and editor of an inflammatory Communist newspaper here in Landshut; his wife; Dr. Alfred Mann; Dr. Karl Mann; his wife and two of her sisters."

Heinrich removed his pince-nez glasses, took out a handkerchief and began cleaning them, a sneer on his thin lips, his mustache going crooked.

"Karl Mann," he stated flatly. "The coward has become a doctor just like his leftist liberal father. Well..." Himmler's sneer deepened. "Have them arrested."

Heydrich took out his notebook and a pencil. "On what charge?"

For the first time since Reinhard Heydrich had begun working for Himmler he watched as Himmler became blood red with anger and raised his voice. "*No charge! I just want them arrested! Now!*"

"Yes, of course, Herr Reichsfuhrer," Heydrich whispered subserviently. "The women, too?"

Himmler thought for a moment then shook his head. "No. Just the publisher, the doctor, and his son, the doctor."

"Yes, sir. Would you like them brought here for interrogation?"

"No. Just put them in a cell at Munich Police Headquarters. I'll think of what to do with them later."

"Yes, sir," Heydrich said, snapping to attention.

"That's all, Heydrich."

Heydrich thrust his hand forward in salute. "*Heil*, Hitler!" then quickly turned and left.

Himmler sat down, crossed his legs and smiled. Yes, things had worked out just fine since he'd left this godforsaken town so many years ago. If it weren't for his mother he would never have come back to Landshut again. His father hadn't spoken to him since his departure.

He turned to a nearby S.S. lieutenant. "Get my driver. His name is Hitzinger."

"Yes, sir!" the lieutenant sbarked, snapping his heels loudly. Heinrich winced and replaced his glasses.

Chapter Ten

Christine and Marianne had both gone home and Karl and Alfred sat in the living room reading. Helga had gone upstairs to put Gunther to bed. Alfred read the medical journal that Karl had made reference to earlier while Karl read Walter's newspaper.

Suddenly, the front door crashed open and five armed S.S. soldiers marched in. Alfred and Karl both jumped to their feet and Helga called down, "What was that?"

As the S.S. captain stepped forward the four other soldiers leveled their weapons at the two shocked civilians.

"Alfred and Karl Mann, you are under arrest."

"Why?" Alfred demanded.

"By direct order of the Reichsfuhrer S.S.," stated the captain who promptly turned and headed back for the door. Two soldiers stepped to either side of both men and brusquely took their arms.

Helga reached the bottom of the stairs and the captain raised his black-gloved palm to her face indicating that she should not go any further. Gunther stood at the top of the stairs in his nightshirt and watched as the S.S. men took his father and grandfather away.

"The Reichsfuhrer S.S.?" Karl asked as he was pulled outside. "Who's that?"

"Heinrich Himmler," the soldier replied holding his right arm. "Now shut up!"

Karl and his father were physically thrown into the back of a troop truck, the four enlisted Nazis following after. The captain got into the passenger seat of the cab and they drove away.

Every time Karl or Alfred tried to speak they were told to shut up, so they ultimately sat quietly, occasionally looking at each other with pained, baffled expressions.

In about five minutes the truck stopped. Two of the soldiers jumped out of the truck, the other two stayed where they were—eyeing their prisoners with a challenging glare.

A moment later Walter Hossbach, in his shirtsleeves and cursing, was heaved into the back of the truck.

"What the hell do you think you're doing!? You can't treat a citizen like this!"

The captain came around to the back of the truck. "One more word out of him and you have my permission to shoot him." He turned and was gone.

Walter looked up from the floor perplexed. Completely helpless and unable to speak, Karl shrugged.

They rumbled along in the dark in silence for the next hour and a half, then were hustled out of the truck and into a cell in the basement of the Munich Police Headquarters. It was a large cell that contained many other prisoners, mostly itinerants, drunks and petty thieves, with possibly a murderer or two in the lot. Karl, Alfred and Walter were the first of their species—*Political Dissenters*.

Heinrich Himmler sat calmly in the backseat of his Mercedes Limo with S.S. Lieutenant Wolf Hitzinger at the wheel driving. Hitzinger oddly resembled his master: almost exactly the same height and weight, the same weak build, the same mustache, but with a totally blind and obedient attitude.

Opening his black leather briefcase, Himmler removed a manila envelope, unbent the clasp and slid the contents out on his lap. It was the deed to a 150-acre farm in Gmund am Tegernsee, Austria, right on Lake Tegernsee. This was where he would retire in thirty-five or forty years. With a smile he returned the deed to the envelope and replaced it in his briefcase.

A few moments later they reached their destination. It was a large vacant field. The automobile pulled off the road, bounced over some railroad tracks and came to a halt. Heinrich rolled down the tinted window, surveyed the field, pursed his thin lips and nodded. “Yes, this will do just fine.”

The field was located twelve miles northwest of Munich, just outside the small town of Dachau.

A week later, when Karl, Walter and Alfred had begun to acclimate themselves to the dark, dank cell in the Munich Police Headquarters basement, six S.S. men marched into the cell, grabbed the three political dissenters from Landshut, dragged them outside and threw them into the back of a truck. Alfred's leg caught on a sharp edge of the truck's bench. His scream was spontaneous, as was the rifle butt that smashed him in the mouth knocking out all of his front teeth. Karl threw himself at the soldier and before he could even get his hands on him a rifle butt cracked him in the temple.

A chunk of time disappeared for Karl. When his senses returned, the truck was in motion and his father and Walter were sitting on the floor holding him. He looked up at his father, but instead of finding the reassuring smile he had known his whole life, he found a bloody toothless gape. Horrified, Karl drew back in repulsion. Walter grabbed him and he

instinctively jerked the other way, then the stock of a Nazi rifle smashed down an inch from his nose stopping Karl cold.

They arrived at the now barbed wire-encircled field outside Dachau and came to a halt. A platoon of regular army engineers were stationed beside the field in tents. S.S. guards were posted all around the perimeter of the vacant field, now a prison.

Karl, Walter and Alfred were Dachau's baptism—the first human beings held in this space against their will.

Once again they were dragged from the truck, through the movable roll of barbed wire blocking the entrance, and thrown down into the mud. Within the confines of the barbed wire, they were alone.

As the next several weeks passed the prison camp was constructed around them, along with their unwilling help. Soon another group of prisoners was brought in and they too were all forced to labor for the engineers. At the end of the month there were nearly a hundred prisoners, all attired in whatever clothes they were wearing when arrested, all ragged

and filthy. An S.S. officer appeared one day with several trucks loaded with boxes that all contained blue and white-striped prison uniforms. Their civilian clothes were confiscated and exchanged with the uniforms. Soon thereafter an order came through that all the prisoners' heads were to be shaved weekly. Now the ever-increasing number of prisoners all looked pretty much alike.

One day Himmler's black Mercedes drove through Dachau's newly-built wrought iron gate bearing the slogan, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*," meaning "work makes you free." The car pulled up in front of the unfinished main office building. Himmler and Hitzinger, who carried a two-foot-square cardboard box, got out of the car. The prison commander, S.S. Major Hilmar Wackerle, a pot-bellied man with a bulbous nose, stepped out of the building and greeted the Reichsfuhrer S.S.

"*Heil*, Hitler," Wackerle proclaimed, thrusting his hand forward in salute.

"*Heil*, Hitler," Himmler replied weakly returning the salute. Reaching into his coat pocket he took out an envelope. "This is the system I have

devised for prisoner identification. From the envelope he removed a yellow six-sided star. A Jew." A black square. "A political dissenter." A pink triangle. "A homosexual." A red crescent. "A Communist." Himmler replaced the patches back in the envelope and handed it to Wackerle. Hitzinger set down the box.

The guards were having the prisoners form a line.

"I want a garden planted here," Heinrich said. "I'll check and see what would be best-suited to grow here. I'm sure several kinds of herbs would grow well in this soil."

"Of course," Wackerle said. "Where do you think it should go?"

Himmler began to point to a spot just past where the prisoners were assembled. Then he recognized Karl Mann, head shaven and dressed in prison stripes. And his stinking liberal father and that Communist, too. Heinrich turned to Wackerle with an idea.

"When you give out the identification patches," he pointed at Karl, "he doesn't get one."

Karl watched Heinrich Himmler pointing at him, and even though he couldn't hear a word he was saying, he knew something bad was imminent.

"And also," Himmler continued, "I do not want him killed, make that very clear to all of the guards. Anything short of that is perfectly fine, but don't kill him."

"What of his father?" asked the major.

"He's just another prisoner—make it political."

Most of the prisoners were given black squares. A few, including Walter, were given red crescents. Karl got none.

"Why didn't they give me one?" Karl asked his father.

"Who knows? These are crazy people," Alfred replied, finally becoming proficient at speaking with no front teeth. "If you really want one bad enough you can have mine."

Karl shook his head. "They'd probably knock out the rest of your teeth for giving it to me."

His father grew very self-conscious, covering his mouth, and Karl was sorry he'd said it.

As more and more prisoners were brought in daily, increasing the labor force, construction of the camp was soon complete. Construction had begun on prison camps all over Germany. The Nazis then decided that these were not prisons at all but would henceforth be referred to as "concentration camps," after the South African internment camps.

After construction was finished on the Dachau concentration camp, the labor force was sent to the Krupp tractor factory two miles away. Karl didn't really mind the work—there was certainly more than enough to fill the day and they were out of the squalor of the camp—but Alfred was having difficulty keeping up. The minute amount of food they were given every day was nutritionally worthless—a thin, gruel-like substance, a stale chunk of bread, and a watery, minty liquid referred to as "coffee." Their bathing facility consisted of one long outdoor shower with freezing cold water and no towels. The toilet was a board with holes in it sitting on top of

a stinky, foul, twelve-foot-deep latrine trench. This was for all of the prisoners, now numbering over a thousand and increasing daily. Every week a detail of prisoners had to empty the trench with buckets.

As each new arrival encountered Karl that same question was always asked, "Why doesn't he have an identification patch?" This question was rarely asked of Karl directly, and since no one knew the answer, the general suspicion was that Karl must be some sort of trustee or informer and therefore was not to be trusted or even spoken to. In Karl's mind it was like being in the army again. Luckily, he still had his father and Walter.

By the end of 1933 there were over fifty concentration camps in Germany. Dachau was the main processing and transfer point and now housed nearly fifty thousand prisoners. In late November all of the Communists were rounded up, loaded into cattle cars on the train and shipped to other camps. Karl didn't even get a chance to say goodbye to his friend, Walter Hossbach. He and his father returned from the factory one day and Walter was gone. Karl grieved for his friend and Alfred grieved for his son.

And the days slowly, painfully, and repetitiously crawled past . . .

Chapter Eleven

1934-1941

In addition to being the Reichsfuhrer S.S., Heinrich Himmler was appointed by Hitler's second-in-command, Hermann Goering, as the Police President of Munich. A year later he was made Chief of the Prussian Gestapo, the undercover police force founded by Goering.

After considerable planning on the parts of Adolf Hitler, Hermann Goering, Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, a scheme was concocted to purge Ernst Roehm's S.S. of its excessive amount of unruly members. On the evening of June 30th, 1934, known as the "Night of the Long Knives," all of the unmanageable top-ranking S.A. officers in all of the major cities of Germany were simultaneously lined up and shot. Himmler accompanied the S.S. men to Roehm's house, and when they kicked in the door they found him in bed with his young blond male chauffeur. Himmler had the chauffeur shot immediately, then had his old commander taken to Munich Police Headquarters. Roehm was put into

solitary confinement and given a pistol with one bullet in the chamber. When the dawn came on July 1st a thousand S.A. men had been executed and Ernst Roehm had not used the bullet. Himmler had Roehm executed too, then went home and vomited.

During the next several days 50,000 of the S.A. members were enlisted into the ranks of the S.S. and Heinrich felt much better. He now had control of over 100,000 men in the S.S., as well as 30,000 more in the Munich Police and the Prussian Gestapo. Heinrich was well on his way to becoming the most feared man in Germany.

In June of 1936, Himmler was appointed chief of all German police. In July he held a ceremony commemorating the one-thousandth anniversary of the death of King Heinrich the First, where he said, "Heinrich the First never forgot that the strength of the German people lies in the purity of their blood. For the S.S. man there is one absolute principal: he must be honest, decent, loyal and friendly to persons of our own blood—and to no one else."

Adolf Hitler declared to the world that the German people were the "master race" and put into effect the "new order," meaning that all German-speaking people would be reincorporated into Germany. Hitler then arranged a "Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis," and an anti-Communist alliance with Japan, Italy, Spain and Hungary.

On March 12th, 1938, Nazi columns marched into Austria. Without firing a shot they took control of the government and forced the abdication of Chancellor Dr. Schuschnigg. The maneuver was known as the "Anschluss," meaning connection. Two days later the union of Germany and Austria was announced to the world. Germany had now increased its strength by seven million people.

Hitler then demanded that Czechoslovakia give back the Sudetenland, a strip of land along the German-Czech border containing three million German-speaking people. Czechoslovakia had several strong friends, foremost among them were Great Britain and France. Instead of

coming to their ally's aid, however, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain admonished Czechoslovakia to yield. In response Czech Premier Benes called a vote to let his people decide the issue. Adolf Hitler wouldn't wait and demanded immediate and total surrender.

Fearful of war breaking out, Chamberlain flew to Germany and met with Hitler at his mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden. He begged Hitler to wait. Premier Benes promised resistance to the invasion. French Premier Daladier also flew to Germany to plead for delay. At a conference held in Munich on September 29-30, Chamberlain and Daladier gave Hitler the Sudetenland without conferring with Benes.

Neville Chamberlain, upon his return to London, declared, "My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time."

British Parliament member Winston Churchill retorted, "Britain and France had to choose between war and dishonor. They chose dishonor. They will have war."

Eleven months later, on September 1st, 1939, German tanks rolled into Poland in what was known as the "Blitzkrieg," or lightning war. Finding less than token resistance, the Germans immediately took control of the government.

On September 3rd, Great Britain and France declared war with Germany. On October 7th, Heinrich Himmler was appointed Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood. No one in the Third Reich was certain what this post meant or entailed, but it made one fact certain—next to Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler was the most powerful man in German-occupied Europe.

In the course of the next two-and-a-half months, beginning on April 9th, 1940, the Nazi Wehrmacht, or armed forces, invaded and overran Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and France. Only Great Britain held out. From September 7th, 1940 through May 10th,

1941, Hermann Goering's Luftwaffe, or Air Corps, dropped 190,000 bombs on London.

But the British, having replaced Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain with Winston Churchill, would not give in. During the eight months of the "London Blitz," British gunners shot down 2,600 of Goering's bombers.

Since Heinrich Himmler's Death's Head Corps operated all of the concentration camps (which were now located in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Netherlands), Adolf Hitler came to Himmler with what he considered a major problem. With the war underway, Hitler decided it was time to put "the Final Solution" into effect. This meant the extermination of all Jews in Europe. This was going to be a task of enormous proportions because there were nearly eight million Jews residing in Europe. Killing Jews by firing squads had been going on for a while, but this method of execution would not do for eight million Jews, not to mention all of the Gypsies, and the others that needed to be exterminated to "beautify" Europe. No, there would have to be some

cheaper, more effective method than firing squads. Hitler assumed that the answer was probably some sort of gas (as he had offhandedly mentioned sixteen years earlier in *Mein Kampf*), but he wanted Himmler to consider all possible methods. That was simply a matter of research and bidding, and that was Himmler's expertise.

What Hitler considered to be a problem, and of great importance, was *how* do the good Germans of the Death's Head Corps exterminate all of these millions of people, albeit pestilent Jews, without feeling any loss of honor; without losing their faith and courage, and without losing their minds?

Himmler countered that that was the reason all of the concentration camp prisoners had their heads shaved and were dressed similarly in blue and white-striped uniforms, thus giving them anonymity. That, however, was not sufficient for the Fuhrer. It's not that he wanted the Death's Head Corps to not feel bad about what they were doing; he wanted them to feel *good* about it. He wanted them to feel that they were truly doing something positive for the Fatherland.

Himmler agreed with the Fuhrer in the utmost importance of this and said that he and Heydrich would go right to work on it.

Three days later Himmler returned to Hitler's offices at the Chancellery in Berlin with a bound, fifty-page report. The first part was Himmler's conception: henceforth, each entire concentration camp would have just one toilet facility and all of the showers would be removed. Toilet privileges would be limited to one ten-minute period each day, which would prove woefully insufficient for everyone. With the Jews of Europe presently being shipped to the camps on overloaded cattle cars, disease was rampant and the "natural order" would account for 10 to 15 percent perishing *en route*, with possibly 40 to 50 percent of the remaining Jews becoming diseased and expiring soon thereafter due to a complete lack of medical attention. Since they would not be allowed to evacuate their bowels or bladders, both the ill and the healthy would befoul themselves, causing disease to spread more quickly, thus the "natural order" would work all the faster. Once they had all befouled themselves, which would

occur in short order, the S.S. Death's Head Corps would view the Jews as they really were: pestilent, stinking, unsightly animals, and, hopefully, the Jews would look upon each other the same way, thus preventing any forms of group uprising. Once the Jews had been forced to this low state, the S.S. Death's Head Corps would feel no worse than a butcher slaughtering a muddy, foul-smelling hog.

Gas chambers would be constructed and many of the Jews could be herded directly into them after their long train trips with the story that these facilities were in fact showers. Faucets would be installed to perpetrate this idea.

The I.G. Farben company presently produced a disinfectant called Zyklon B, a crystalized form of cyanide. Fifty pounds of crystals had exterminated up to 225 Jews in tests. It was administered through the air vents on the roof. The process took about an hour. Researchers recommended the use of earplugs for the soldiers due to the screaming.

Reinhard Heydrich's contribution to the report was suggesting that a corps of prisoners should be formed—all Jewish—to deal with the corpses.

This way the S.S. Death's Head men would not only not have to directly watch the exterminations, but wouldn't have to see the remains, either. The Jewish prisoner corps—the *Sonderkommando*—would dispose of the corpses, dig out the gold teeth, then cut into the stomachs and bowels in search of valuables. The *Sonderkommando* themselves would regularly be executed.

Hitler was very impressed with Himmler and Heydrich's work, and immediately had all of their ideas put into effect.

Soon thereafter, Heydrich had the further idea of playing light, lyrical, classical music all of the time in the concentration camps. Heydrich was a rather accomplished violinist and frequently played for high-ranking S.S. gatherings. He had prisoner orchestras formed—ever-changing orchestras since the members were regularly executed and new ones were forced to join. Most camps, however, having no one there to take an interest in such things simply played classical records over the public address systems.

Himmler ran the death camps very efficiently and thousands of Jews and other undesirables began to lose their lives every day. Many high-ranking Nazis felt that they were foolishly wasting valuable slave labor, but no one stringently opposed anything that the Fuhrer *really* wanted, that would be foolish and quite possibly, fatal.

Quickly there became a new problem—the corpses were building up so rapidly that graves could not be dug fast enough. Hence, Heinrich Himmler put out a bid for crematoria. The firm of C.H. Kori won the bid for Dachau—the first and still considered the model concentration camp—and supplied four large ovens. The firm of I.A. Topf and Sons, a heating company in Erfurt, won the bids for most of the other camps.

Two companies, Tesch and Stabenow of Hamburg and Degesch of Dessau, acquired the patent rights to Zyklon B from I.G. Farben. They supplied up to two-and-three-quarters tons of the cyanide crystals to the camps monthly.

Himmler had commissioned doctors to do research on genetic breeding in the hope of finding a method for breeding pure Aryan children, but it wasn't until he received a letter from a Dr. Sigmund Rascher requesting live subjects for Luftwaffe high-altitude tests, that the full possibilities of medical experiments occurred to him. The Reichsfuhrer S.S. responded to Dr. Rascher that "prisoners will, of course, be made available gladly for high-flight research." A Luftwaffe decompression chamber was moved to the Dachau concentration camp and tests were begun. All of the test subjects died during the course of the experiment.

Himmler then commissioned all sorts of medical experimentation on prisoners, the most extensive being performed by Dr. Josef Mengele at the Auschwitz concentration camp.

On December 6th, 1941, a labor detail of fifty prisoners at Dachau was busily draining the twelve-foot deep latrine trench with pails. This was an excruciatingly long arduous task, not to mention utterly revolting. Among the detail were two ragged men who looked a thousand years old—Karl

and Alfred Mann. These two men formed a unit that dealt with almost no one else. Any communication with other prisoners was handled exclusively by Alfred since no other inmate would speak to Karl for fear that he was some kind of Nazi trustee of informant. These two men had been there longer than anyone else, eight years, which was suspect in and of itself, and the younger one, unlike any other prisoner, had no I.D. patch.

Alfred had long since lost the remainder of his teeth to a variety of gum diseases. He had also lost all of his hair and now weighed eighty pounds. Karl weighed more since he was taller, but was equally as thin, still had most of his teeth, and a little bit of hair that was shaved off weekly. Both father and son had sores all over their bodies, and within the last several months Alfred had begun shaking badly and having blackout spells.

The two were always at the head of every work detail and basically led the others, allowing the S.S. guard to do nothing but stand there and watch. This kept them in good graces so they were not beaten too often anymore. Karl and Alfred were at the head of this day's work detail, too.

Karl dipped a pail into the sea of urine and excrement, his right foot firmly planted in the muddy slope running into the trench as he scooped out a pail, handed it to his father who in turn handed it down the line of bald skeletons where it was finally hauled up a ladder and dumped into a large metal bin sitting on a train car. It was then transported to nearby farms to be used as fertilizer.

Due to the quick execution rate, as well as transfers to other concentration camps (particularly Auschwitz in Poland, which had the largest crematorium ovens, able to dispose of two thousand corpses at one time, with electric conveyor belts running through them, produced specifically for this purpose by I.A. Topf and Sons), and also the once-a-day toilet privileges, the latrine trench never got as full as it might. Karl and Alfred had had to retrain themselves to urinate and defecate as they marched—it was the only way. Also, since the real showers had been removed, instead of drinking the "coffee" served in the afternoon, they both saved it to wash with later on. Both of them always had bits of cloth with them to wash themselves and also to rub their teeth and gums. Some

others saw them do this, took heed and did the same. Most, however, did not and they always perished first. The very second you gave up you were dead.

Neither Karl nor Alfred had yet given up during their eight-and-a-half years of imprisonment. They both believed that if they could just hold on, someday this madness must end. However, on this evening Alfred had another of his spells, blacked out and fell right past his son into the fetid trench. Karl made a move to try and help, but a rifle barrel was jabbed into chest pushing him back. Karl just stood there and watched his father drown.

Many hours later, when Karl and the other prisoners on this work detail finished draining the trench, Alfred Mann's body was recovered, stuck in the mess at the bottom. Karl and another man dug him out, then he was thrown in a pile of corpses. He was cremated the next morning.

As Karl and the others were marched back to the barracks, stinking so terribly like shit that the S.S. guards wouldn't get close to them, Karl

attempted to assess his feelings about his father's demise. He couldn't feel anything. All of his emotions had been destroyed. He was a living zombie.

On that day in early December, as the *Sonderkommando* cleaned Alfred's ashes from the oven, the Japanese armada was well on its way across the Pacific Ocean. A few hours later the Japanese attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The United States promptly declared war on the Axis powers of Japan, Germany and Italy. American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt said on the radio the next day, "Yesterday, December 7th, 1941—a date which will live in infamy."

Chapter Twelve

1942-1945

Once the United States entered the war, Allied military defeats ceased. From 1942 onward the Allies took the offensive. The Russians, during a particularly cold winter, finally took the offensive along the Eastern Front. The tide of war had shifted.

Karl was now the solitary old man of Dachau—at the age of forty-three. He spoke to no one and no one spoke to him. Whenever a group of prisoners was ordered away to the firing squad, or to the gas chamber, or to the medical compound for experiments, or to the train to Auschwitz, all of which were fatal, Karl's name was never called. His torture was to go on and on endlessly. He had to watch hundreds of thousands of frightened men, women and children pass before his eyes on their way to death; to watch hundreds of corpses at a time being transported from the gas chambers to the crematorium; to live in an insect-infested 24-by-24 inch box, six feet long, a coffin really, constructed like a beehive with the

incarcerated stacked four above him. His father was dead and who knew what was happening to his wife and son? Or Walter, for that matter. The sores covering most of his body itched constantly. He wet the end of his frayed washcloth in coffee and gently dabbed at the sores on his thigh. If he was extremely diligent about it he could actually get some of the ulcers to heal, occasionally, but not usually. When the sores were gone the scarred skin generally didn't break out again, so he kept at it as much as he could. He used the other end of the cloth to vigorously rub his gums and teeth. Even so, Karl had still lost six teeth, one of which had been kicked out by an S.S. jackboot. That, however, was many years ago. He now understood the system better than the young S.S. guards. Karl had been there longer than any of them, including the camp's commander who had changed several times. Karl no longer even knew what his own name was. It made no difference, and he had learned how to stay practically invisible. He knew all of the hiding places in camp to avoid extra work details, and when he was punished or reprimanded he never uttered a word. Most of the guards and inmates assumed that he was mute.

The only time he was anywhere near human was when he was in his box tending to his bodily needs, after which he would fall asleep for the blessed few hours the S.S. allowed.

Reinhard Heydrich, or "Hangman Heydrich" as he had come to be known (and enjoyed), had himself appointed Acting Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, an ancient seat of Bohemian kings, and a title not given out in a thousand years. He resided at Hradschin Castle outside Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he lorded over the lives and deaths of everyone around him.

On May 27th, Heydrich left his castle unescorted in his 1936 Mercedes-Benz 320 Convertible B two-seater sports car heading for S.S. headquarters in Prague. As he drove through the Prague suburb of Liben, two members of the Free Czechoslovakia Army in England, Jan Kubis and Josef Gabcik, parachuted from an R.A.F. plane, threw a British-made anti-tank grenade under Heydrich's car and blew him up, then escaped under a smoke screen with the aid of local priests.

At the direct order of Hitler and Reichsfuhrer S.S. Himmler, the S.S. took swift and brutal revenge. Every man in the town of Lidice was shot, and all of the women and children were shipped off to concentration camps. The village itself was razed to the ground. Eight days later Kubis and Gabcik were located in a church in Prague and executed.

On the same day, Reinhard Heydrich, whose spine had been totally shattered in the explosion, died in extreme pain.

Karl had forgotten how to dream of his home or his wife or child. His dreams were whirling scrambled images of outer space, extra pieces of bread, or his early childhood when he and his parents still lived with his mother's parents on a farm outside Landshut. His grandparents were old people even then. When his mother died of influenza, both of her parents followed soon thereafter. It had been a season of funerals.

Suddenly a boot crashed into the wood beside Karl's head. Karl bolted awake—without sitting up—there wasn't enough room in his coffin/bed chamber. Many bruises on his head had taught him that. He still

did it occasionally, but thank God not today. He really despised being woken up so brutally—it left him on edge all day. He dragged his aching frozen body out of his box and scurried over to the food line with his tin cup, his body swathed in a multitude of rags wrapped and tied around him. The emaciated skeleton of a human being beneath the rags weighed seventy-five pounds.

With his tin cup full of slightly warm wheat and corn mush (that occasionally had a potato in it), Karl headed over to the latrine. He went there because everyone else avoided it. He could no longer smell the stench. His nose perpetually ran, was red and inflamed and hurt to the touch. If he could only get warm, but . . .

Using his fingers he slowly ate his breakfast, keeping each scoop in his mouth as long as he could, without wasting any time because they would be leaving for work any minute.

The Third Reich was falling apart. The Nazis were fighting a two-front war and losing on both sides. At the same time they were exterminating a vast amount of their own population, as well as major portions of the populations of the countries they occupied. This tied up enormous amounts of Nazi manpower and money.

On May 19th, 1943, Berlin was declared "*Judenfrei*"—free of Jews.

On August 24th, Heinrich Himmler was appointed Minister of the Interior with a specific directive from the Fuhrer—"Combat defeatism."

Himmler responded by increasing the daily rate of executions.

On September 3rd, Italy surrendered to the Allied Invasion Forces. Five weeks later Italy declared war on Germany.

The Siege of Leningrad started on September 8th, 1941, when the Germans cut off every road into the city. For the next 872 days the Germans did nothing but attack, making it one of the longest and most destructive

sieges in history, and by far the most costly in terms of casualties, numbering 85,371 on both sides. But the Russians would not capitulate, so the siege was finally lifted on January 27th, 1944. This was a declaration that the war on the eastern front was entirely lost to the Nazis.

Having finished breakfast, with the sun yet to rise, Karl and two hundred other prisoners were marched three freezing cold miles to the Krupp munitions factory. When Karl had begun working there they had produced tractor engines. When the war began they had retooled for tank engines. Now they made 9-mm bullets.

Karl's entire day was spent outside the factory in a mountain of used shell casings sorting usable ones from damaged ones that had to be melted down to make others. This was a job nobody but Karl wanted because it was outside, but Karl preferred it because he was left alone, and the more he was left alone the greater chance he believed that he had of not being executed. The other prisoners who were assigned this job beside Karl usually died quickly, but somehow Karl did not. His torture went on and

on interminably. When he filled a box of good shells he had to carry it into the factory, stand in a slow-moving line, then stack it at the head of the production line. This was the only warmth Karl felt during the entire day. The S.S. guards made sure the prisoners didn't dawdle, so the more boxes Karl filled the more time he could legitimately spend inside. The filled boxes were counted and anyone who didn't meet the quota of ten boxes per day was summarily shot. Karl had filled as many as sixteen boxes in a day, although he generally averaged thirteen or fourteen, which was still more than anyone else.

None of the S.S. Death's Head Corps guards liked Karl because of the standing order that he was not to be killed. Just the sight of him angered them. That was why he was so accomplished at being inconspicuous. Another thing that Karl made sure to do was to keep the patchless side of his ragged uniform muddy so that the blank spot would not be as readily apparent.

For five days at the end of February, Allied Strategic Air Forces tried a new approach: carpet bombing Axis military and industrial installations, factories, railroads, and oil refineries for twenty-four hours a day. General Henry H. Arnold, Commander of the U.S. Army Air Force, said, "Those five days changed the history of the air war."

On June 6th, three million Allied troops, along with five thousand large ships, four thousand landing craft, eleven thousand aircraft and, for the first time in military history, prefabricated floating harbors for unloading troops, all sat waiting along the British coast of the English Channel. Allied Supreme European Commander General, Dwight D. Eisenhower, stood on a British airfield watching the gray clouds spit rain on him. Finally, when the fog began to slightly dissipate, Ike said, "Let 'er rip!"

The Allies crossed the English Channel and stormed Normandy Beach in France. German Western Front Commander, Field Marshall Karl Gerd von Rundstedt, put up a fierce resistance.

By September the Russians had captured Romania, and with it the remains of the Ploesti oil fields. Very soon the Germans would have no fuel left at all.

In November Heinrich Himmler met with Dr. Josef Mengele, still a handsome smiling man with a space between his teeth, his thick dark hair beginning to gray. His nickname was the "Angel of Death." They met at S.S. Headquarters in Berlin. Mengele and Himmler were to meet later with Hitler at his bunker at the Chancellery. Mengele entered Himmler's office carrying a large, black, alligator-skin doctor's bag, upon which was written in gold leaf lettering, "J.R.M."

"That's a very nice bag you have there, Doctor," Heinrich commented.

"Thank you," Mengele said, obviously proud of the bag, and flashing his infectious smile. "My wife gave it to me when I opened my first practice."

Himmler looked around nervously, then leaned forward and whispered, “How are the gold and diamond shipments moving out of the Polish and Czech camps?”

“Fine,” Mengele said. “It’s all going to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria.”

Himmler leaned back and sighed. “Good.”

Hitler, Himmler and Mengele sat in a darkened meeting room beneath the Chancellery and Mengele showed slides on a screen. He narrated the procedures as the results were viewed. Mengele was busily working on what Hitler termed “Miracle Weapons,” specifically nerve gas and biological weapons.

“The most effective nerve gas yet tested,” Mengele said, changing slides to show a naked male Jew in his mid-thirties strapped to a medical table and being injected with a syringe, “has no real name as yet. It is alternately referred to or *Trilon 83*. Although presently, my scientists are humorously calling it *Zyklon A*.”

Hitler and Himmler both chuckled and Mengele went on.

"When injected into subjects in its liquid form, Trilon 83 seemed to cause possibly the most agonizing death of any nerve gas yet tested." Mengele changed slides that now showed the naked man writhing in what was clearly horrible pain. The next slide showed the man obviously dead with blood running from his eye sockets. "It attacks the nervous system and actually rots it away in less thirty minutes. It also causes the eyeballs to shrink and in some cases implode. The substance itself is highly corrosive and unless pressurized quickly loses its potency." The slide changed again to a stainless steel test tube with a small plunger on the top beside a sealed rubber needle port. Mengele carefully removed the same test tube from his bag with his index finger and thumb and held it up before Hitler and Himmler. "By pumping the plunger the liquid stays pressurized."

"Very ingenious," Himmler commented.

"Why thank you, Herr Reichsfuhrer," Mengele replied with a smile. "I designed it myself."

On August 25th, Allied forces liberated Paris. The American First Army advanced through Luxembourg and crossed the German border.

As the Russian forces grew closer in the east, Himmler began to get frightened and had the crematorium at Auschwitz destroyed.

Before the Allies could cross the Rhine River, Hitler made a last-stand attack. He sent his forces straight through the center of the fifty-mile front at the Ardennes Forest and surrounded the Allied-occupied French town of Bastogne. Field Marshall Walter Model (von Rundstedt's replacement) requested that the American 101st Airborne in Bastogne surrender. The 101st Commander, Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, replied, "Nuts!"

Eleven days later the American Third Army broke through the German lines, relieved Bastogne, then kept on moving into Germany toward Berlin.

Karl spent the day reloading 9-mm shells. Over and over he pulled down a handle that rammed the lead bullet into the powder-filled shell casing.

The bombing in the area around Munich was becoming intense. High-pitched whistles of incoming artillery shells occurred every couple of minutes, causing everyone in the factory to dive to the floor and crawl under tables. The slave labor was now on fifteen-hour shifts. This gave them just enough time to run back to the camp, eat, sleep a few hours, then go back to work.

The Nazis' precision-like system had totally fallen apart. Jews were building up in the camps, or locked up in cattle cars on the train tracks, and there were not enough Nazi personnel to either exterminate them or ship them out. The trains were no longer running on schedule, many not arriving at all, and many others being bombed *en route*. Thousands of Jews and other undesirables starved to death in locked cattle cars.

Karl and the labor crew (which was desperately short of hands, but absolutely could not have a Jew included—being worked to death, the

Nazis felt, was too good for Jews) walked back to the camp from the factory. Bombs were exploding all around Munich just twelve miles away. Every now and then a bomb would explode nearby and everyone, including the S.S. guards, dove to their faces in the ditch. When they were halfway back to the camp, the Krupp munitions factory took a direct hit and the concussion knocked them all down. Due to its contents, the factory continued to explode for half an hour.

His face illuminated by fiery explosions, Karl managed his first smile in many years. So much for making bullets.

Back at the camp the S.S. men were in a frenzy. Thirty thousand Jews had piled up at Dachau and direct orders from the Reichsfuhrer S.S. himself had come down to exterminate all of them immediately. With the S.S. Death's Head Corps contingent down to three hundred men, the task was impossible. And the bombs just kept crashing in all around them.

During all of the confusion Karl snuck off to his cubicle—no dinner had been served—and fell asleep. He dreamed of the dinner he hadn't had, and the time when the cook's assistant wasn't paying attention and

mistakenly gave him two helpings. That had been a long time ago, but in his dream his cup was doubly full and he smiled to himself—a bent, wrinkled, seventy-pound ragged gnome with a distended belly and nine missing teeth.

In early January of 1945, the Russian Red Army entered Warsaw and Krakow, then liberated Auschwitz. Even the Russians were shocked by what they saw, and that was saying something. Nothing like Auschwitz had ever existed before in the history of humanity—a mechanized death factory.

The Russians halted their western movement long enough to assemble every man, woman and child who could hold a weapon forcing them all to fight.

Unbeknownst to his master, *der Fuhrer*, Himmler had been having secret negotiations with Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden regarding surrendering the German armies of the west. Himmler had also been

meeting with Red Cross officials and in February let a few of them into several concentration camps. What was the difference now, he thought, the world already knew. He recalled Ernst Roehm on the roof of the war Ministry having all of his men of the Reichskriegsflagge remove the ammunition from their weapons when he realized they were surrounded; it had made a difference.

Himmler and Goering had also been meeting to plan their own revolution, throw out Hitler and take over. Unfortunately, since they both demanded to be absolute ruler, their plans came to naught.

Hitler now lived in his bunker below the Chancellery, even though Berlin was being bombed to smithereens by the Americans. He declared to one and all that he had no intention of leaving.

Adolf Hitler no longer trusted Hermann Goering, nor any of the generals in Berlin for that matter, yet still, somehow, some way, still trusted Himmler, appointing him Commander of the Replacement Army, a small force comprised mostly of young boys, as well as members of nearly

every division of the Wehrmacht that had retreated to Berlin, which it was now their job to defend. This force would be utilized as a last-stand to defend Hitler's bunker.

On the evening of April 23rd, Himmler met again with Count Bernadotte, this time at the Swedish Consulate at Lubeck on the Baltic Sea. Their meeting took place in the cellar due to intense bombing by the R.A.F.

"The Fuhrer's great life is drawing to a close," Heinrich stated with assurance. "In a day or two Hitler will be dead. I urge you now to communicate to General Eisenhower Germany's willingness to surrender to the west. In the east, however, the war will have to be continued until the western powers themselves can take over that front against the Russians."

Bernadotte sighed heavily. "But Herr Reichsfuhrer, the western powers and the Russians are allies."

"Only for now. You'll see. Also, please inform General Eisenhower that I would be pleased to head up the occupation forces for him."

"Certainly," said the count, removing some papers from his briefcase. "I have a testimony of surrender drawn up for Germany to the western powers, will you sign it?"

Squinting through his glasses at the dim document for a moment, lit only by the light of several candles on the table since the electricity was out, Himmler removed his pen from his pocket and signed the document.

"I hope," Heinrich said most sincerely, "that you and I can bury the hatchet."

Count Bernadotte shook his head. "I am afraid there has been too much bad blood for that."

Himmler handed back the signed surrender document. "Now if General Eisenhower doesn't accept within the week then our alternate deal will go into effect, is that correct?"

"Of course," Bernadotte said. "We will provide you with safe conduct out of Germany to the country of your choosing on a Red Cross plane in exchange for the lives of ten thousand Jews."

Himmler removed his pince-nez and began cleaning them on a handkerchief. “Ten thousand Jews might be something of a problem. Could we make it five thousand?”

The count grew angry. “The deal was made at ten thousand and that is how it shall remain! I will not barter a single life!”

Heinrich smiled and lifted his hands. “No need for anger, my dear Count, I was simply negotiating. Ten thousand it is.”

The Russians now had a force of over four million men, women and children in their army, including all of the new recruits they kept enlisting along the way. Under the commands of Marshal Georgy Zhukov and Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, the First and Second White Russian Armies and the First Ukrainian Army began their final move into Berlin.

On April 28th, Joseph Goebbels, who was living in Hitler’s bunker with his wife and children, picked up a British news report on the radio

telling of Allied Supreme Commander Eisenhower receiving a document of surrender signed by Heinrich Himmler.

For Adolf Hitler this was the final blow; his most trusted friend had turned on him and the Fatherland.

By morning Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, were married and his last will and testament was drawn up.

Part Three
1945
April 29 to May 23

Chapter Thirteen

As the sun rose over Dachau concentration camp on the morning of April 29th, 1945, Karl slept peacefully in his box dreaming of when he was four years old snuggled up warm in his mother's lap on a bright cold spring morning . . .

He opened his eyes and in fact it was a bright cold spring morning, only he was a prisoner living like a cockroach in a pesticide factory.

But at least he hadn't been woken up by the alarming boot of an S.S. guard slamming into the wood next to his head. Where was the guard? Karl scrambled from his box and went to hide. There weren't very many guards left and since the factory was destroyed he'd been on body disposal duty. After one day of this Karl did something he'd never done before; he hid all day and didn't work. It was the most suspenseful day of his life, but he hadn't got caught, so he'd done it every day since.

He walked intently straight across the camp to the furthest of the four giant ovens, as though he'd been sent on a special assignment, then

climbed the metal ladder to the top of the brick building, down over the lip and onto the roof. Only the first of the four ovens was still in use, and the fourth hadn't been used in weeks, so they'd never look up here. Just in case, however, Karl crawled around the perimeter peering over the edge to see what the remaining guards in the vicinity were up to, but to his joy he couldn't spot a single guard. Terrific, now he could get some sleep. He took one last look toward the west into the woods where it was still sort of dark and . . . was that something moving? It was probably the S.S. replacements they'd been expecting for the last month. Karl strained his bulging bloodshot eyes. Wait a minute, these weren't S.S. They weren't even Germans. These soldiers were wearing green—*they were Americans!*

Karl hadn't spoken a word in months, except for the occasional, "Yes, sir," and now when he tried to yell nothing came out. He coughed, tried again, and gargled, "Americans!" Many of the prisoners had come to the same realization themselves, and were now crowding up to the wire and cheering, which in turn caused other prisoners to see what was going on.

Very carefully, so as not to fall and break his neck at such an auspicious moment, Karl climbed down the metal ladder. When he reached the ground he found that he was shaking. He was frightened. More frightened than he had been in years. Bright spots were flashing in front of his eyes and he was hyperventilating. He staggered back to the barracks and crawled into his box.

A half an hour later the U.S. Army's 522 Field Battalion, made up mainly of Japanese-American soldiers, known as the "Nisei" or "the Purple Heart Division" for their astounding bravery, shot off the lock on the front gate of Camp IV and liberated the prisoners at Dachau concentration camp. Many prisoners believed they were being overrun by Japanese troops, which seemed worse to them than Germans, so they fled to the far end of the camp awaiting the worst. Their fears were soon assuaged with Hershey bars and cans of K-rations. One prisoner gobbled a Hershey bar so fast he dropped dead on the spot.

The Nisei troops were revolted by what they saw, and smelled. A pile of one hundred dead bodies was aflame in the center of the camp. Dead bodies were strewn everywhere, in piles, in lime pits, in the ovens, in the barracks, and the stench of death was overwhelming. The stench of the living was not much better in their excrement-covered striped uniforms and soiled woolen caps; thousands of bug-eyed living skeletons grabbing at the soldiers in gratitude and appreciation.

In short order the U.S. forces took over the camp, set up first aid facilities and field kitchens and began serving hot food. The corpses that had built up everywhere were hauled into piles by the remaining S.S. guards, several of whom strenuously objected, took off running and were summarily shot. American soldiers wearing gas masks and rubber gloves also stacked dead bodies while army engineers bulldozed trenches to dump them in.

Two young Japanese-American soldiers wearing gas masks and rubber gloves, both on the verge of retching, were carrying the feather-light dead to the quickly growing mountains. They reached the beehive barracks

and began pulling cadavers from the boxes. Each of the two soldiers grabbed both of Karl's arms at the same moment. Karl instinctively jerked free, scaring the young soldiers so badly they nearly had heart attacks.

S.S. Lieutenant Wolf Hitzinger left the communications room of the S.S. Headquarters in Berlin, made his way through the nearly vacant building to the office of the Reichsfuhrer S.S. where he found Himmler all alone seated at his impeccably clean desk. Hitzinger saluted.

"*Heil*, Hitler."

Himmler raised his hand slightly.

Appearing agitated, Hitzinger said, "I finally received word from Lieutenant General Berger and he is on his way to Austria."

" Good," Himmler replied unenthusiastically. Berger was second-in-command since the demise of Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich was an awful bore, Himmer thought, but he was completely dependable. Berger is a dunderhead.

"General Berger also said that the Fuhrer has declared you to be a traitor and that you are to be shot on sight."

Himmler shrugged.

"I would also recommend, Herr Reichsfuhrer, that we leave here as soon as possible. The Russians are moving up the Saarlandstrasse and the Wilhelmstrasse and should be here all too soon."

Heinrich slowly rose to his feet, went into the bathroom and began mixing up a mug of shaving cream. "Contact the Replacement Army and have them attack up the Wilhelmstrasse as soon as they arrive. Did you get the motorcycle?"

"Yes, sir."

Himmler removed his jacket, hung it on the doorknob and began lathering his face, including his mustache. "Find any food and water you can and load it into the sidecar. I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Yes, sir," Hitzinger said, wiping his sweaty forehead, turning smartly and leaving.

He's a good man, thought Himmler stropping his razor. He put the end of his baby finger against the tip of his nose, lifted it slightly and began shaving off his mustache.

At 3:30 P.M. on April 30th, Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun were married in the Chancellery. Immediately following ceremony Hitler put a pistol in his mouth and blew his brains out. Eva Braun took a fatal dose of poison. The newlyweds were burned in the Chancellery garden where, moments later, a Russian shell obliterated the remains.

After Karl had been given numerous shots for every possible disease, had eaten enough food to make him sick, then had gone back for more and gotten sick again, then had been issued green army fatigues, he went to see who was in charge. In the main office he spoke with a young army sergeant.

"When can I leave?" Karl asked in English.

"Anytime you'd like," the sergeant replied in German.

Karl shook his head and blinked, then rubbed his eyes. “That is very difficult to believe.”

The sergeant held up his right hand. “I swear it’s true. You don’t happen to live anywhere near here, do you?”

“About forty-five minutes east of here. Landshut.”

“You can probably get a ride part of the way, or all the way if you find the right guys. We’re going east.”

“And I can leave right now if I’d like?”

“Yes.”

“Then I think I’ll go,” Karl said.

“Would you mind me asking you a question?” the sergeant asked.

“Not at all.”

“Well . . . how long have you been here?”

Karl rubbed the stubble on his bony head and took a deep breath. “I have been in prison since February 1st, 1933. All together that is twelve years and three months, exactly.”

The young sergeant was astounded, his mouth open, unable to reply.

"And now, if you'll excuse me," Karl said, turning to leave, "I really have to get home."

Karl hitched a ride on a Jeep with three teenaged soldiers who were going right near Landshut.

"You *shprakenzee* English, old man?" one of the soldiers asked.

Karl nodded, the collar of his fatigue jacket coming up to his hollow cheeks. "*Ya*."

"How old *are* you?"

Karl smiled revealing many gaps where teeth used to be. "I became forty-seven last week."

The young soldier hooted in astonishment. "Jiminy, you look older'n my grandpa."

"Hey, that ain't nice," the driver said.

"Well, shit, it ain't my fault. Blame it on the goddamn Nazis."

Karl sank deeper into his oversized green coat.

Heinrich Himmler bounced along in the sidecar, his bare upper lip feeling strangely cold, while Lieutenant Hitzinger drove the motorcycle up a thin dirt road outside Hohenlychen, northwest of Berlin. As they approached a main, paved road, Hitzinger pulled the motorcycle into the woods. He and Himmler both dismounted and crept through the woods up to the road, surveying the situation carefully. There wasn't a soul around. They went back to the motorcycle, drove it over the main road, then back into the woods following another thin dirt road on the other side. A quarter of a mile up was a secret airfield.

Allied troops crossed the Austrian border and were within a few miles of Mauthausen concentration camp. In the camp's medical office Dr. Josef Mengele, Professor August Hirt, also a practitioner of Nazi medical experiments, and Himmler's second-in-command, S.S. Lieutenant General Gottlob Berger, were all changing out of their warm woolen suits and into light, white, cotton suits and donning straw fedoras.

Behind the medical office, which was part of Mauthausen's main office building, the three men got into a waiting automobile and were driven out the back gate of the camp to a nearby airstrip. An American DC-3 airplane with Red Cross markings sat revving its engines when they arrived. S.S. men were busily loading heavy wooden crates into the back of the plane. The three men got out of the automobile and waited as the driver unloaded three suitcases from the trunk.

"That's a lot of gold and diamonds," Professor Hirt quipped as he watched the crates being loaded.

"Fifty million marks' worth," Mengele smiled. "Enough to buy a country."

"Shall we get aboard," suggested Berger, a fleshy, mean-looking man.

Just as they reached the top of the stairs Mengele stopped. "Damn! My bag!"

"What was that?" Hirt asked.

"I've forgotten my medical bag."

Professor Hirt grinned, slapping Mengele on the shoulder. “I’ll buy you ten of them when we land.”

“Ten?” chuckled Berger. “We could buy ten thousand hospitals.”

Mengele shook his head. “But it was a present from my wife.”

“Well,” Berger said, “we can’t go back for it, Josef, so get in the plane.”

Mengele shrugged, removed his straw hat and went through the door with the other two right behind.

As the Red Cross plane neared Berlin, Mengele stepped up to the cockpit and spoke to the S.S. pilots.

“There has been a change of plans, Captain. We will not be stopping at Hohenlychen but will continue straight through to Argentina.”

Lieutenant General Berger jumped to his feet. “What are you doing? We must pick up Reichsfuhrer Himmler. He arranged this flight.”

“There has been a change of plans,” Mengele repeated.

"That's not possible," Berger stated. "I know exactly where we must land."

"It's too dangerous," Hirt added.

"Much too dangerous," Mengele agreed, reaching into his white cotton jacket. "Now please sit down."

"But sir—"

"Sit down!" Mengele commanded, drawing a pistol.

"I will not allow this!" Berger declared pushing past Mengele toward the cockpit. Dr. Mengele shot in him twice in the back, then without a word, he and Professor Hirt opened the plane door and dumped out the dead body.

Heinrich sat in the sidecar while Hitzinger scanned the sky with binoculars. Himmler squinted back up the dirt road that led out to the main road through his only pair of horn-rimmed glasses. Russian troops began streaming past on the main road.

"I see them," Hitzinger said.

"Are you sure it's them? What are the markings?"

"Red Cross markings, sir." He handed Heinrich the binoculars.

Lowering his glasses, Himmler put the binoculars up to his eyes, adjusted for a second and saw the plane. "It's them, thank God!"

The plane grew nearer and nearer, then Heinrich swung the binoculars around as it passed right over their heads.

"What the— *Mengele, you bastard!"* He furiously threw the binoculars. "*God damn you!*"

Heinrich turned and saw a long line of Russian troops, including tanks, coming right toward thenm, about an eighth of a mile away. Without a moment's hesitation Himmler removed the Lugar from his holster and fired point-blank into Hitzinger's temple, knocking him off the motorcycle. He hastily removed Hitzinger's coat before it got bloody, removed his own coat and put on Hitzinger's. He climbed on the motorcycle, disconnected the sidecar, kicked the starter and took off at full speed into the woods, quickly heading west away from the Russians.

Chapter Fourteen

The American soldiers in the Jeep dropped Karl just across the Isar River, at the edge of Landshut. They hollered and waved goodbye as they drove off.

At least the town was still there and hadn't been bombed to dust as Karl had often feared. Other than the complete lack of pedestrians it was exactly as he remembered it. Karl crossed the bridge, his new American army boots annoying his feet in a variety of places since he had worn nothing but rags on his feet for so long.

There was a deathly quiet as he walked across the center of town, past the church and the school, past Walter's old newspaper office, now deserted. He made his way into the residential section, past his in-laws, the Kleinschmidts' home, around the corner and there was his house.

It was empty. All of the windows were broken, many panes of glass entirely gone, and Helga's green curtains, now faded and in shreds, blew fitfully in the breeze. The front door was wide open and off its upper hinge.

In a panic, Karl ran inside and found everything gone or destroyed and not worth taking. It had obviously been uninhabited for years. He stumbled outside, looked around blindly, then dashed up to the house next door—his sister-in-law, Christine Kroll's, house. He banged on the front door and no one answered. Stepping back he looked up to the bedroom window and saw someone peeking through the curtains.

"Christine!" Karl yelleddesperately. "Where's Helga?" Through the living room window he could just see some older children sitting on the stairs peering through the rails.

Christine came out the front door, saw Karl, burst into tears and grabbed a hold of him. "Karl, what have they done to you?"

Sobbing, she pulled him inside, sat him down at the kitchen table and poured him some tea. "It's rather weak because we have to reuse the leaves so many times. And of course there's no milk or sugar." She turned away, still crying.

Karl sipped the steaming liquid, reawakening a part of his mind that had been shut and sealed for so long.

"Christine," Karl asked quietly, "where are Helga and Gunther?"

Christine's four children gathered in the doorway—the eldest, a raven-haired girl of fourteen, looked quite a bit like both Helga and Christine when they were young. Christine turned and looked at her children, then began sobbing anew.

"They took Helga away, Karl. The S.S. men—Himmler's men—took her to a concentration camp in Linz. That was four years ago."

Karl was stricken with pain, his puffy bulging eyes welling up in tears. "But why?"

Christine wiped her nose with a handkerchief, then handed it to Karl. "When the S.S. came to get all of the families of the Communists they'd already arrested, Helga hid Erika Hossbach and her children in your attic. When the S.S. found them two months later they sent Helga, Erika and the children to Mauthausen concentration camp and nobody has heard from any of them since." She buried her face in her hands.

"I'll find her," Karl stated through his tears, tightly gripping Christine's hand. "I lived through it; I'm sure she did, too. She was always stronger than me."

"Yes, maybe," her sister replied hopefully.

Karl wiped his eyes. "And what of Gunther? What's happened to my son?"

Christine's weeping began anew. "Both my boy Hermann and Gunther were drafted. That was even before they took Helga away. I used to get letters from Hermann at first, but they stopped years ago. Nobody's heard from either of them ever since."

"I'll find Helga and Gunther."

Now Christine grabbed Karl's hand. "Find Hermann, too. You can take Martin's car if you'd like. It's been sitting in the shed for years."

Karl didn't want to ask, but had to. "What happened to Martin?"

Aggrieved, she shook her head. "He was killed in France. Blown up by a bomb the very first week he was there. The War Ministry sent me a telegram saying he was dead, then two days later I got a letter from him

saying everything was fine." She took the smudged, tear-stained, dog-eared letter from her apron pocket. Her children had now begun to cry, too.

Karl finished his tea. "I'll take the car if it'll start."

"And you'll look for Hermann?"

"Of course. Just as hard as I'll look for Helga and Gunther. I'll need a recent picture of him since I don't know what he looks like anymore. I haven't seen him since he was a little boy. Or Gunther."

"You wouldn't recognize either of them. They both grew into fine, good men. I'll get you a photograph of both of them together at their high school graduation."

"Thank you."

Christine smiled through her tears. "Thank God you're alive, Karl. It's been so long and dear God, look what they've done to you."

"Don't cry," Karl soothed. "And now, what are the names of these beautiful children here?"

Christine's smile returned. "Come here, children. I want you to meet your long-lost uncle Karl."

Hesitantly, the four children stepped up to the wrinkled, emaciated little old man who sat smiling at them with half of his teeth missing, looking older than time itself.

The 1936 Fiat 500A *Topolino*.

When Karl pulled the dusty tarp off the car he found the tiniest automobile he'd ever seen—it was a red, 1936 Fiat *Topolino* two-seat convertible coupe in perfect condition, except for four flat tires. Christine and the kids stood in the doorway watching.

"You have to hand it to him," said Karl, impressed. "Martin always knew how to take good care of a car."

"Yes, he did," Christine nodded, her eyes watering up yet again.

By putting a stick down the gas tank, Karl found to his surprise that there was still a third of a tank. He looked around the wooden parking shed, found a length of rubber hose, then siphoned out some gas into a jar to prime the carburetor. With bated breath he turned the key, pressed the starter button and . . . nothing—the battery was dead.

"Damn!" Karl said, pounding the steering wheel. The Kroll family moaned in disappointment. Karl turned off the key and climbed out of the tiny automobile.

He began tearing through the multitude of boxes of car parts and found exactly what he was looking for—a battery charger. Karl brought the battery and the charger into the house and plugged it into the one working outlet above the kitchen table. His sister-in-law wasn't overjoyed at having a greasy old car battery on her nice clean table—particularly during dinner—but they laid down newspaper and somehow she persevered.

As the sun rose the next morning, Karl, now attired in one of Martin's oversized suits (which would have been too big even if he hadn't lost all

this weight), stood in front of his abandoned house. His weathered face betrayed no emotion. Slowly, he went inside.

All of their furniture and belongings were gone, some of which were over a hundred years old and had been handed down by Karl's great-grandparents. All that remained were Helga's ragged green curtains and the ratty, mildewed carpets.

Karl's and Helga's bedroom was also empty. Not a trace of the wonderful life they'd lived there remained; just broken glass and litter. Obviously somebody had been staying in there over the course of the years, although, at this late date, it certainly didn't matter who.

Slowly walking across the bedroom, Karl stopped at the far corner. He took the toe of Martin's large wing-tipped shoe and poked at the corner of the mildewed carpet which was loose and easily folded back. Karl bent down and removed three floorboards that were not nailed down. Beneath the boards was a rusty metal box that Karl removed and opened.

Inside the box was a pile of ten-mark notes, as well as Karl and Helga's passports. They had both gotten passports for their one and only

vacation to Vienna after Karl had graduated medical school. It had been a lovely week going to museums, drinking beer at outdoor cafes and listening to Strauss waltzes played by talented orchestras.

Sitting on the floor, Karl looked at Helga's beautiful young photograph. They'd been so happy together. Then Gunther was born and they became even happier. It had been a grand time. Gone forever.

Sighing deeply, Karl whispered, "I'll find you and Gunther. If it's the last thing I ever do."

With every joint creaking and cracking, Karl stood, put the money and passports in his coat pocket and left his house.

Karl reinstalled the battery into the car. Did it take a charge? Once again, the Kroll family watched from the doorway in suspense. Karl primed the carburetor again, pumped the accelerator several times, turned the key, gave a short prayer and hit the starter. The Fiat coughed, gagged, ground, hiccupped, snorted, then finally started. The puny little 569-cc

engine roared to life like a noisy little sewing machine. Black smoke billowed out the tailpipe, engulfing the cheering Krolls.

Karl rolled down the window and said to the eldest boy, twelve-year-old Wilhelm, “Can you find a tire pump?”

“I think so,” Wilhelm nodded.

“Then find it and let’s pump up these tires.”

Wilhelm did as he was told and found a tire pump. As Karl attached it to one of the tires he turned to Christine. “Can you spare any food?”

“Yes,” Christine nodded. “Some canned goods, a few potatoes and some bread.”

“Don’t leave yourself with nothing.”

“I won’t.”

“Good,” Karl said. “Could you quickly pack that up, and a jar of water, too. Oh, and a blanket if you can spare it.

Christine nodded and went into the house.

Karl looked up from the tire pump at the kids who were all staring at him. He smiled his gap-toothed grin.

"Once I get back I'll take you all for a ride, one at a time."

Christine returned in a few minutes with a straw picnic basket, a pickle jar full of water, a blanket, a pile of old roadmaps and her late husband's pistol. Karl took everything except the pistol.

"There are still a lot of Russians and marauders around, you may need it."

Christine nodded, putting the pistol into her apron pocket. Karl loaded the items into the small space behind the two seats. He then reached into his coat pocket and removed the wad of money. Christine's eyes lit up.

"Where did you get that?"

"It was hidden in the bedroom." Karl shook his head. "I can't believe it was still there." He peeled off two-thirds of the money and handed it to Christine. "Here, buy some food."

Christine gratefully took the money. "Thank you, Karl. Thank you so much."

Bidding the children farewell with a wave and kissing Christine's wet cheek, Karl put the Fiat in gear and drove east out of town, following the same path that the American Eighth Army had taken five days earlier.

The homeless filled the roads carrying bundles, pushing carts loaded with clothes, furniture, paintings; some carts were being pulled by skeletal horses or mules. There was also the occasional automobile, usually being pushed or pulled. Among the crowds were dazed, newly-released prisoners still in their ragged blue and white-striped uniforms, looking more skeletal than the horses and the mules.

On the first stretch of clear highway Karl put the accelerator down to the floor—ostensibly to burn the carbon out of the valves—but really just to see what this tiny car had in it. Flat out it reached sixty kilometers per hour. Not bad for a motorcycle engine. Zipping along at sixty was fun. He let out a half-impressed whistle, and with all these teeth missing he could now really whistle, whereas he'd never been able to before.

About twenty-five miles outside Munich he came upon an American P.O.W. camp full of German soldiers. He stopped to look for Gunther and Hermann. He parked the puny car outside the gate between two large green army trucks. As he got out of the car Karl felt like a small child getting out of a toy automobile.

At the front gate two guards checked the credentials of those entering. Karl stepped to the end of the line, behind two American officers; four men who looked like local German officials; and a man with glasses and a doctor's bag. One by one they were all admitted. When it was Karl's turn the American soldier asked in German, "What is your business?"

"I'm looking for my son and my nephew," Karl replied.

"But what is your official business?"

"That's it."

"I'm afraid that's not sufficient," the guard said curtly turning to the next man in line.

"But what of my son and nephew?"

Annoyed, the soldier turned back. “You’ll just have to look elsewhere.” He allowed the man behind Karl to enter, then turned to the next.

Karl left feeling utterly helpless.

As he was getting into the car he happened to glance into the back of one of the army trucks. It was loaded with ten-gallon metal cans. He casually unscrewed one of the caps and sniffed—gasoline.

With two cans sitting on the seat beside him, Karl got back on the road.

Thirty miles further east he came upon another American P.O.W. camp and once again was denied entrance.

Upset and confused, Karl sat in the car on the side of the road puffing on one of Martin’s old wooden pipes that Christine had thoughtfully included, along with a tin of terribly old tobacco that tasted absolutely wonderful to Karl, even if it did crackle and spark as it burned. He studied a road map of lower Bavaria and upper Austria.

What would be the best place to cross into Austria? Clearly it was Braunau am Inn, across the Inn River, and on the direct route to Linz. But who controlled the border at this point? The Americans? The Russians? Could it possibly be the Austrians? It was their border after all. Certainly not the Germans who didn't appear to control anything anymore.

Well, it wasn't far and he'd soon find out. Karl put the little Fiat in gear and drove away.

Chapter Fifteen

The German side of the Austrian border was at Simbach am Inn, on the northern bank of the Inn River. The border checkpoint was thankfully manned by green-clad American soldiers. Most of the traffic across the bridge was American military vehicles that were being passed right through without waiting.

Karl pulled into the fast-moving line and was soon at the checkpoint. The middle-aged sergeant with a graying mustache asked in German, "Passport?"

Karl handed him his passport. The sergeant opened it, looked at the photo, glanced up at Karl, then did a double take. "This is you?"

"I was younger then," Karl sighed.

The sergeant nodded. "Weren't we all. What's your business in Austria?"

"Sightseeing."

Shaking his head, the sergeant smiled, “You’ve chosen a fine time for it.”

Karl smiled back. “Better than two weeks ago.”

“That’s true.” The sergeant pointed at the two green cans of gasoline. “Where did you get those?”

“From a kindly American soldier, like yourself.”

The soldier nodded, stamped the passport and handed it back. “Cute little car.”

“Yes,” Karl said. “It’s a Fiat Topolino. That means ‘Mickey Mouse’ in Italian.”

The sergeant chuckled. “No kidding? Well, have a good time sightseeing, and don’t get in the army’s way.”

Taking his passport back, Karl said, “I won’t. Thank you.”

The soldier waved him through and Karl drove over the bridge into Austria.

Braunau am Inn was a beautiful old city, and best known as Adolf Hitler's birthplace. That little rat, thought Karl, he wasn't even German. Look at the mess he caused. Unforgivable.

The tiny Fiat puttered and bounced across the cobblestone streets, then was soon back out onto the highway. A road sign stated, "Linz, 56 Kilometers." At top speed, he thought, I could be there in less than an hour. Unfortunately, there were too many slow-moving American military vehicles to go fast, so Karl took his time. Nor was he particularly eager to get where he was going.

When Karl arrived at Mauthausen concentration camp the Americans were still busy burying the dead. Bulldozers pushed mountains of corpses into giant communal graves, then covered them over with lime and dirt. No prayers were said, nor any tears shed. Thousands of emaciated former prisoners still in their striped uniforms wandered aimlessly around the camp, the gates wide open. Apparently, nobody cared who went in or out.

Parking the car beside an open cattle car on a railroad siding, Karl walked right into the camp. He passed rows of medical tents and long lines of prisoners at food tables, then entered the main administration building. At the multitude of desks in the front office, American soldiers were attempting to go through the voluminous amount of paperwork left behind by the Nazis. Say what you would of the Nazis, they did keep scrupulous records.

"Excuse me," Karl said slowly in English to a dark-haired lieutenant at a desk. "I am looking for my wife."

The lieutenant swung his chair around and replied in German. It seemed like a lot of Americans spoke German.

"Are you sure she was in this camp?"

"I believe so," Karl said.

"Well, I'll tell you. It seems like the Nazis kept records of just about every person they ever brought into this stinking hellhole, but it's going to take weeks, maybe months, before we get through all of it. So, if you want

to come back, say, at the end of the month, we may be able to let you know something."

"But there are so many bodies," Karl pleaded. "I have to know if my wife is alive."

"Over 250,000 people were brought to this place and there are less than 10,000 survivors. When was your wife sent here?"

"1942."

The lieutenant rubbed his weary eyes. "Anything's possible, but three years in this horrid place? I wouldn't count on it."

Karl was getting upset. "But I have to know."

"Like I said, come back at the end of the month."

"I've been in prison myself for the past twelve years," Karl stammered, now on the verge of tears. "I can't wait anymore."

The lieutenant turned away as though he too might start crying. "You can look around all you'd like. You might try the office across the hall. There's an old man in there that's been the file clerk here forever—he

was a trustee or something, so he might know. Sadly, I don't think he can talk. At least, I've never heard him talk."

"Thank you," Karl said, wiping his eyes with Christine's handkerchief that he forgot to give back.

Crossing the hall, Karl entered the office that had formerly belonged to the camp's Chief Surgeon, Professor August Hirt, which it said on the door. Karl knocked, but there was no answer so he just went in. Behind the desk sat a bald, shrunken old man with broken, exceptionally thick glasses tied around his head with a string. He glanced up at Karl, annoyed, immediately looked back down, then slowly looked back up.

Karl's eyes widened in disbelief. "Walter?" he asked incredulously.

"Karl," Walter replied, twice as amazed.

"Is this where you've been since they took you from Dachau?"

Walter nodded. The two old friends stared at each other, several lifetimes hanging between them.

Karl swallowed the lump in his throat. "Walter, was Helga brought to this camp?"

Walter Hossbach nodded again. “They brought Helga and Erika and my children here at the same time.”

“Is Helga alive?”

Walter began blinking rapidly, tears streaming down from behind his glasses. He shook his head.

“None of them are, Karl. They’re all dead.”

Walter took a deep uneven breath, then looked back down at what he had been doing.

Suddenly Karl felt faint and was having difficulty breathing. He lowered himself into a chair and sat down on a pile of clothes. Without thinking he picked up the dark, clearly expensive, woolen pants and coat and set them on a table beside a black alligator doctor’s bag.

“Walter, what do I do now?”

Walter didn’t look up or say anything.

“All I have left in the world is my son, but how will I find him? They won’t let me into any of the P.O.W. camps—they let everyone else in, but not me. What can I do?”

Wiping away his tears Karl saw the pile of clothes beside the medical bag with the initials “J.R.M.” engraved on it in gold-leaf. Without another word he stood, removed Martin Kroll’s thin, baggy, overcoat, replaced it with one of the warm, expensive, woolen ones, then took the doctor’s bag.

“I’m going to look for my son, Walter. Do you want to come along?”

Walter shook his head without looking up.

“All right,” Karl said, regaining his composure. “Then I’ll see you at home.”

Walter said nothing and Karl left.

Chapter Sixteen

It hadn't been five hours since Karl crossed the border and now he was crossing it again going the other way. He encountered the same sergeant with the graying mustache. As the soldier saw Karl and the little car he grinned.

"Well, if it isn't Mickey Mouse. Already done sightseeing?"

"There wasn't much to see," Karl stated flatly.

The sergeant appeared surprised. "In Austria? It's a beautiful country."

"Not where I was."

"Where was that?"

"Mauthausen concentration camp."

"No," the sergeant agreed with a frown, "that's not beautiful. In fact, it's the most horrible thing I've ever seen in my life. What were you doing there?"

Traffic was building up behind Karl, but the sergeant raised his hand and everybody waited.

"I was searching for my wife."

"I don't see her in the car with you, so I won't ask."

"No," Karl said. "Thank you for your consideration."

The sergeant took Karl's passport, stamped it, handed it back and waved him through.

As Karl drove back toward Munich he stopped and checked the American P.O.W. camps that had not previously let him in, only now he simply showed the doctor's bag, said he was there to examine the prisoners and was immediately admitted. He really did examine the prisoners, too, as he asked about Gunther and Hermann, showed their photo, and inquired as to the possible whereabouts of the 11th Bavarian Infantry—his old unit. He hoped that his son had gotten along better in the army than he had.

Karl saw every type of wound imaginable and did what he could. Unfortunately, there were no antibiotics of any sort in the medical bag he'd picked up. Instead, it was crowded with many little bottles of drugs that he'd never heard of, as well as several syringes, and a variety of surgical tools.

That night just east of Munich, Karl sat on a blanket beside the car just off the road eating a tin of herring by candlelight. He opened the doctor's bag, rummaged around and found a small, leather-bound notebook with the gold-leaf initials, "J.R.M."

Karl read, in abbreviations and technical medical terms, the story of three years of medical experimentation on Jews at Auschwitz. He read of the Reichsfuhrer S.S. commissioning Mengele to conduct tests with live female subjects artificially inseminated with a vast variety of animal sperm; he read of the results of grafting limbs from one person to another; the dissection of all twins who came into the camp, although Mengele apparently had no clue what he was looking for. All of his tests failed and

most of his patients died. He read of the unnecessary amputation of limbs, of intentionally infecting one twin with typhus or other diseases, and transfusing the blood of one twin into the other. He then read about the use of a wide variety of chemicals that might possibly be used as a nerve gas. Mengele minutely detailed the extent of the subjects' agony, and proudly stated that of all the many substances tested, one called "Trilon 83" caused the most terrible death. The remainder of the notebook was blank except for a receipt from the I.G. Farben company for the design and manufacture of one prototype stainless steel pressurized test tube. The receipt was signed, "Joseph Rudolf Mengele."

"Mengele!?" Karl exclaimed. "I know him. And he seemed like such a friendly, eager fellow back in medical school. Horrible."

Shaking his head in disgust, Karl replaced the notebook in the bag. That's when he noticed the stainless steel test tube with the plunger in the top. With the end of his index finger he pushed the plunger down and it silently rose right back up. It seems extremely well-made, he thought, then disgustedly shut the bag.

Before retiring, Karl brushed his teeth with the toothbrush Christine had given him. After just a few strokes he spit out a mouthful of blood. Putting away the toothbrush, he reached into his trouser pocket and took out his ragged little washcloth. He wrapped it around his finger, wet the end, gently massaged his teeth and gums, then wrapped himself up in the blanket and fell sleep. He dreamed of being four and snuggled up on his mother's lap.

Going around Munich and heading due north toward Nuremberg, Karl drove directly between the American and Russian occupation forces. Just by following the road Karl was alternately entering and leaving the variously occupied zones.

He stopped at one P.O.W. camp after another, mostly American and British, but none of them offered a hint about Gunther, Hermann or the whereabouts of the 11th Bavarian Infantry. And the sight of so many thousands of injured and maimed young men was overwhelming,

particularly for a doctor who had just spent twelve years in a concentration camp, unable to help anyone, including his own father.

As Karl continued north and crossed the Danube River he came within twenty miles of the German-Czech border. That's probably controlled by the Russians, he thought, and best to avoid.

A long straight stretch of road south of Leipzig was slightly elevated above the level of the forests on either side and entirely desolate: no bombed-out tanks or cars, no hordes of wandering homeless people, no bomb craters, just an empty couple of miles of smooth road, the early morning sunlight and the chirping of birds.

Suddenly there was the low rumble of engines—a lot of them. Three-quarters of a mile down the road troops began appearing from the forest heading west across the road. Within moments there were literally tens of thousands of Russian infantrymen crossing the road accompanied by a thousand tanks and trucks bearing red crescents and sickles on their sides, all going up over the road, then back down into the forest. When the last

troops and vehicles had passed, a dusty haze hung over the road, now rutted and torn-apart road.

A moment later Karl came driving up from the south at a swift pace. Suddenly, the steering wheel jerked out of his hands and he nearly lost control of the little car as the wheels bounced in and out of the tank tracks. Clonking his head on the ceiling, Karl watched as everything in the car flew around madly like it was caught in a hurricane. After just a few minutes the road became smooth again.

"They ought to fix that," Karl muttered under his breath, rubbing his bruised head. Luckily, it was a leather convertible top, but it still had metal ribs in it and his head had managed to connect with one of those. Karl shook his aching head and kept driving.

He continued north past Leipzig and crossed the Elbe River. POW camp after camp with no word of anything. He was beginning to get discouraged, but would never give up, not as long as there was any hope of finding his son.

As he came within forty miles of Berlin the buildup of troops became intense. There were soldiers were from almost everywhere: America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, England, and so many Russians it was frightening. Karl hastily veered away from the capital, now heading northwest toward Hamburg. He re-crossed the Elbe and entered the British-occupied sector . . .

Chapter Seventeen

Right up near the North Sea where the wind was so powerful that it felt like it might tip the little car over several times, halfway between Hamburg and Bremen, and just outside of the town of Bremervorde, Karl stopped at his fourth British P.O.W. camp that day. Pulling the car over next to the wire fence, Karl approached the guard at the front gate.

"State your business," the brusque British corporal said in English.

"I am a doctor here to examine the prisoners," Karl replied in a well-rehearsed bored tone. "The Health Ministry in Bremervorde sent me to check for contagious diseases." He had already used this lie twenty times, simply changing the name of the town each time and it never failed.

"Go on," the corporal said waving him through.

Karl wandered through the camp scrutinizing the faces of the prisoners, not even sure that he would recognize his own son if he saw him. He kept the photo of the two boys in his coat pocket, referring back regularly. If anyone appeared as though they needed medical attention he

would examine them and ask if they knew the final whereabouts of the 11th Bavarian Infantry, which, from all he'd heard, had gotten broken up and scattered across the country. He would then ask specifically about Gunther Mann and Hermann Kroll and show the photo, but, as yet, no one had heard of either of them.

After two hours and examining about twenty prisoners with still no results, Karl became despondent. He slowly sat down on an empty bunk in one of the barracks, exhausted and unable to think of what more he could possibly do. A handsome young blond-haired prisoner with a bandaged arm in a sling sat down beside him.

"What's wrong, Herr Doctor? You look ill."

Karl took a deep breath and turned to him. "I'm looking for my son and nephew."

"Oh? What division were they with?"

"The 11th Bavarian Infantry," Karl intoned bleakly.

The young man's eyes lit up. "I was with the 11th Bavarian. What's your son's name?"

"Gunther. Gunther Mann."

Rising to his feet, the young man stared intently down at Karl's face, then said in utter astonishment, "Uncle Karl?"

Karl looked up at the tall, square-jawed man standing over him and smiled in relief. "Hermann, you've grown up."

Hermann sat back down next to his uncle. "Yes, I have. Five years on the Western Front will do that to you. I remember so clearly when they took you and your father away. Gunther and I were eight years old and we both thought you'd be back any day, but you never came back. My mother always told Gunther you'd be coming back, but he thought you were dead. I did, too. That was a black day.

"Yes, it was. Hermann—"

"Have you seen my mother?" Hermann asked, cutting Karl off.

"Yes. Two weeks ago. She's fine, and so are your brother and sisters. But Hermann—"

"Then you've heard about my father."

"I have. I'm sorry. He was my good friend."

"So, where were you all those years?"

Karl sighed. "I was at the concentration camp at Dachau. I was released three weeks ago."

"You were there for twelve years?" Hermann asked in amazement. "How did you survive?"

Karl shrugged. "I survived. Hermann, where is my son?"

Hermann lowered his head, staring down at the floor. "I was there."

"Where?"

"In the very last days of the war, most of our regiment had been killed and Gunther and I were pulled back and stationed in Berlin. We were put into the Replacement Army and assigned to defend Hitler's bunker at the Chancellery. When the Russians had the city completely surrounded we were ordered to attack. There were three hundred of us—mostly kids—and when we got to the end of the street we found the entire Russian Army waiting for us, with tanks and artillery."

"So what did you do?"

"We attacked. Those were the orders."

Karl couldn't believe it. "But who would give such an order?"

"It came directly from the Reichsfuhrer S.S. Our commander objected, and might have even ignored it if it hadn't come from so high up. So . . . we attacked." Hermann pointed to a fellow with a bandaged head lying motionless on a cot. "Me and him are the only survivors of the battle. I don't think it lasted five minutes. And as soon as it started we both just ran away as fast as we could. We headed west because I didn't want to be captured by the Russians. Thankfully, we were captured by the British."

"Are you certain Gunther was killed?" Karl asked in desperation. "Maybe he was just wounded."

Hermann shook his head. "I'm certain. I saw him go down. He was shot many times by a machinegun."

"My son is dead," Karl moaned, rising to his feet.

"I'm so sorry," Hermann said, still crying.

"My wife and my father are dead, too. It's all too much. Why did I survive if they didn't? Why?"

"I don't know, Uncle Karl. Why did any of us survive?"

Completely lost and dazed, Karl rose to his feet, picked up the medical bag, then slowly made his way out of the barracks without looking back at Hermann who sat there sobbing, his face buried in his one good hand.

As Karl stepped from the darkened hut into the bright sunshine outside his eyes began to water. German prisoners and British soldiers walked to and fro, but Karl just stood staring at nothing. All of the movement around him were nothing but ghostly images. He couldn't summon up any strength or reason to move.

One of the hazy images walking near him stepped out of the mist and into focus on his way past. He was a middle-aged man with several double-chins, a pale, pasty complexion, horn-rimmed glasses and "Hitzinger" stenciled on the pocket of his uniform.

Karl recognized him immediately. Suddenly everything became clear; all too clear.

"You!" Karl said, pointing his finger.

Heinrich Himmler stopped and looked all around. “Are you talking to me, old man?”

Karl straightened up. “Yes, you. And I’m not as old as you think. In fact, I’m only two years older than you.”

Heinrich became exceedingly wary. “And how old am I?”

Karl stepped back into the shade of the barracks, set the medical bag on the window sill, opened it and removed a stethoscope. “Unbutton your shirt.”

Heinrich didn’t move. “I do not need an examination, so, if you’ll please excuse me . . .” he started to leave.

“Forty-four,” Karl flatly stated. “Now unbutton your shirt.”

Heinrich stopped in mid-step, then very slowly turned around. He looked like a cornered animal and began unbuttoning his shirt.

“Yes, I’m forty-four,” Heinrich said suspiciously. “Was that a lucky guess or do you know more?”

Karl placed the cold metal end of the stethoscope on Himmler’s white hairless chest. “Let’s just say that I can tell a man’s age by looking at him,

whereas you obviously cannot. I'm not an old man, I'm just two years older than you."

Heinrich appeared relieved. "Well you look a lot older," he said rather snidely. "You should take better care of yourself."

Listening for a moment, Karl removed the ends of the stethoscope from his ears. "So should you. Your heart is beating alarmingly fast." Karl reached forward with his index and middle fingers and pulled down the flaccid skin beneath Heinrich's eyes. "You also appear to be somewhat anemic, too. You should be more careful. A man of your age and condition is quite susceptible to heart failure. You should eat more citrus fruit."

Karl put the stethoscope back in the bag and Heinrich buttoned his shirt.

"I'll do just that," Heinrich said, starting to leave again.

"Wait," Karl said, raising his hand. "You need a vitamin injection."

Heinrich shook his head in disbelief. "Thank you, but I don't really think that's necessary. I will make sure to eat some oranges, though, if can get them."

"Oh, no," Karl admonished him, rummaging through the medical bag. "Your anemia is much too far along for that. You must have an injection." Karl took out a syringe, a bottle of alcohol and a ball of cotton.

At which point Heinrich grew defiant. "I think not, Herr Doctor." And once again he started to leave.

"Guard!" Karl called, though not very loud.

Himmler froze.

Karl wet the cotton ball with alcohol and lifted the syringe. "It would be no trouble to have the guards hold you down and I'll just give you this in the behind."

Heinrich stepped back into the shade, beside the window. He glanced down at the fancy, alligator medical bag and noticed the initials, "J.R.M." They seemed familiar.

"Do I know you?"

Smiling a toothless smile, "Yes you do, Herr Reichsfuhrer S.S. Now roll up your sleeve."

Heinrich stiffened, then slowly rolled up his sleeve.

"J.R.M.," Heinrich muttered in confusion. "I know those initials, but I don't recognize you."

"That's because they're not mine," Karl replied, swabbing Heinrich's arm. "They stand for Josef Rudolf Mengele."

"Of course, that's Mengele's bag. Where did you get it?" Himmler demanded.

"At your death factory at Mauthausen. That's where you murdered my wife. When you had three hundred men of the Replacement Army needlessly attack the Russians you murdered my son. You murdered my father at Dachau. That's where I spent the last twelve years of my life watching hundreds of thousands of human beings get slaughtered. With all of the death camps you must have killed millions. Doesn't it bother you at all?"

Himmler grew furious. "Who are you?!"

"I'll repeat the question," Karl asked, reaching into the bag. "Doesn't all of the killing you've done ever bother you?"

"Who are you?" Himmler repeated.

"When I was in the trenches at Verdun during the first war," Karl said, filling the syringe. "in the 11th Bavarian Infantry"—Heinrich's eyes widened—"I told my best friend, Gebhard, that under no circumstances could I ever take the life of another human being."

And now Heinrich eyes lit up with recognition, then flinched as he was stuck in the arm with the needle.

Karl shoved his face right up to Himmler's.

"I was wrong."

He pushed down the plunger of the syringe.

"You're Karl Mann! The coward!"

Karl brought his clenched fist up to Heinrich's nose. Heinrich also made a fist to defend himself, but Karl didn't try to punch him, he simply opened his hand. In his palm sat the stainless steel pressurized test tube.

Himmler recognized at once. "That's Mengele's test tube."

Karl put the empty syringe and the test tube back in the bag. "So I read, along with Mengele's accounts of all the medical experiments he performed on your behalf at Auschwitz."

Heinrich Himmler looked from Karl's blazing eyes to Mengele's bag, then grabbed his arm and gasped.

"*Oh my God!*"

Karl smiled revealing the many vacant spots where teeth should have been. "Mengele's notes said, 'the most agonizing death of all.' I will be thoroughly fascinated to watch you die in just such a manner, and not from a scientific point of view, either."

"*You bastard!*" Himmler proclaimed, lunging for Karl's throat. Karl attempted to break his grasp and found that his diminished muscles retained almost no strength at all. And there had once been a time when he could have killed this flabby little runt with one hand. Himmler's grip tightened as he pushed Karl's head against the wall.

"Mengele said," Himmler spat, "that it had to be kept highly pressurized at all times or it lost all of its potency within minutes. Well, that backstabbing son of a bitch has been gone for nearly a month! I think this has lost its potency. And now you're dead!"

With his eyes rolling back in their sockets, Karl still managed to shake his head.

At which point a British guard came running up.

"What the bloody hell is going on here?!"

Just as Heinrich turned to the guard a gut-wrenching pain caused him to bolt upright and let go of Karl's throat. He began to gasp, grabbing at his chest where a severe tightening was occurring.

Karl sucked in a huge breath of air, taking hold of the windowsill for support. He pointed at Heinrich. "This man is Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsfuhrer S.S."

"Don't be absurd," he British soldier said with a smile. "I've seen quite a few photos of Himmler and he . . ."

Heinrich's face twisted up in a horrible knot of intense pain and he too began to gasp for air, only his lungs wouldn't accept it.

"You know, he does look something like Himmler, only without the mustache," the soldier said.

Dropping against the wall, Heinrich began clawing at his own throat, his eyes bulging out. Karl and the British soldier watched as Himmler slid down the wall while attempting to reach into his own mouth as though putting his hand down his throat might ease the pressure. Unfortunately, Heinrich's hand would not fit into his mouth, so instead he began to tear out his thin hair.

"Good God, what's happening to him?" the soldier asked in horror.

"Heart failure," Karl said, just as Heinrich succeeded in ripping out two large hunks of his own hair. "Probably due to some kind of poisoning."

"And you say that this is *the* Heinrich Himmler?"

Karl nodded. "It is." Himmler flailed on the ground like a suffocating fish, then began to emit a raspy gurgle while slamming the back of his head on the ground.

"When you recognized him," the soldier offered, "he must have bitten down on some sort of poison capsule."

"Yes," Karl agreed. "That must be it."

Then Himmler's eyeballs began to literally shrink and suck in on themselves. A moment later his eyeballs imploded, followed by streams of blood pouring from the eye sockets. He let out a scream like his leg was being amputated without anesthesia. Karl and the soldier were so shocked by what they were watching that they both took a step backward.

Prisoners and guards ran up from all directions. In moments there was a crowd watching this prisoner in the midst of the most awful death throes anyone had ever witnessed. Just then Heinrich evacuated his bowels and stomach, spewing vomit onto the feet of the spectators around him. Everyone backed up with a massive groan.

Karl picked up the medical bag, closed it, then slowly walked away. He really had wanted to watch, but now he couldn't. He felt nauseous. A group of prisoners left the warmth of a fire in a steel drum just as Karl approached. They pushed their way past him and into the crowd asking, "What's happening?" and "Who's screaming?" Someone else answered, "It's Heinrich-bloody-Himmler. He swallowed a poison capsule he had hidden in his tooth." "Really? *The* Heinrich Himmler?" "Yes. And whoever

prescribed the poison certainly wasn't his friend." They all started to laugh. "Good God, listen to him scream."

As Karl passed the fire in the steel drum, he dropped in Mengele's medical bag. A shower of sparks rose majestically into the air. Karl kept on walking toward the gate. As he neared the guard post the guard asked, "Who the hell is that screaming?"

"I heard someone say that it was Heinrich Himmler," Karl said. "He seems to have taken some sort of poison capsule hidden in his tooth."

"Heinrich Himmler?" uttered the guard in astonishment. "What's he bloody well doing here?"

"Dying," Karl said, heading out the gate.

Climbing into the little Fiat, Karl started the engine and looked up. The guard had left his post to join the crowd. The ex-Reichsfuhrer's screams had become even more shrill and excruciating as prisoners from all over the camp ran up to see what was happening.

Just as Karl was beginning to let out the clutch he noticed his nephew Hermann walking up to the rear of the crowd. Karl honked the horn.

Hermann stopped and turned. There sat his uncle in his father's car waving him over. Looking all around, Hermann began to casually saunter over. When he reached the unguarded gate Karl had the passenger door open and waiting for him as he quickly put the green gas cans behind the seat. Hermann took one more quick look around, then dashed over, climbed in, shut the door and ducked down.

Karl took one more look at the massive crowd, listened as Heinrich Himmler's screams began to gurgle and fade, then let up on the clutch.

"Let's go home."

They drove away.

On May 23rd, 1945, Heinrich Himmler was officially pronounced dead in a British P.O.W. camp near Bremervorde. His mustache was shaved off and on his prison uniform nametag it said, "Hitzinger." No one was knew how he had gotten there, nor exactly what caused his death. Everyone assumed that he had taken his own life with poison, probably hidden in his tooth.

A plaster death mask was made of Himmler's face moments after he died. His expression was a twisted horrible grimace as though he were in excruciating pain.

ALSO BY JOSH BECKER

Going Hollywood (*)
Rushes (*)
The Complete Guide to Low-Budget Feature Filmmaking (*)
Hitler's Dog Fuschl
To the Shores of Tripoli:
The Commodore Stephen Decatur Story
Head Shot: The True Story of JFK's Assassination
Devil Dogs: The Battle of Belleau Wood
The Winds of Fate
Teddy Roosevelt in the Badlands
Cycles
The Lost Eagle of Varus
General Lew Wallace:
He Saved Washington and Wrote
Ben Hur

(*) Published