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“If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual sex within your home, then you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery, you have the right to anything.” And “Whether its polygamy, whether its adultery, whether its sodomy, all of those things, are antithetical to a healthy, stable, traditional family.”

Former U.S. Senator and Presidential candidate 2016

“I would like to develop a couple of ideas for you on the question of homosexuality. There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business, a purely private matter. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual but signify the life and death of the nation.”

Heinrich Himmler, SS Nazi Chief and architect of the holocaust.

## Chapter 1: Early Years

Sitting here in my plush little chair,

In neatly polished glass, a reflection of my cold blank stare,

Like that leaf I spy falling from the Sycamore tree.

Is that you that I see? It matters not who it may be.

Nothing matters now that you have been taken from me.

So, I may not be Robert Frost, but this little poem means a great deal to me. It is difficult to put heartbreak into words, like trying to describe the kind of thick darkness of a room that has no hint of light. We know there is a way to describe such things, but the mind refuses us the kind of relief that will surely come from such an understanding of the abstract. No, I guess I am bound to the cold hard facts of my mundane story. Yes, that is right, I call my story mundane, irrelevant, and common because there is one thing we can all be sure of in this life, we all lose the one we love the most. The only difference is the backdrop of the story, but the result is the same. We live, we suffer, we love, we lose, and we die. This is the great shared commonality of us all, and a lesson we rarely see until the very end, when the horrible deeds are done, and there is nothing left but so many ashes of regret. But I am obviously becoming a bit morbid in my old age. I mean, it is the year nineteen-eighty-five, and I am sitting in my comfy little room at the Sunnyvale Pennsylvania Retirement Community. Don't misread me here, I am not being sarcastic. This is a very good place. I have my own little brown carpeted room, with a very nice twin adjustable bed. The staff were nice enough to bring me some very fine bedding and pillows, since I do not have any relatives to rely upon. Let's just say, that after my arrest in Germany in 1935, the cat was out of the bag. Oh no, did I just use that cliché. Well I guess that overused saying was no different than the one I am about to use, "out of the closet." Yes, that sounds much more modern. I love these American phrases, such as, "out of the closet," "gag me with a spoon," and, "that's so bad," which I discovered means something is good. My point is this, I was not one of those brave enough to proudly proclaim my sexuality during the heyday of 1920's Germany. Oh yes, you youngsters of today believe that you are the pioneers of gay and lesbian

rights, but you are sadly mistaken, but don't worry, I wont talk too loudly over your boasting of originality. Old renegades like me must fade away to make room for the young and high spirited.

All I ask is that you remember us from the past. That you place us in the small italicized footnote at the bottom of your righteous page. Recessions, war, poverty, and the incessant political street fighting violence, has a way of forcing people to prioritize their battles. Gay rights were not high on the list of people's priorities, and neither was the rights of Jews such a concern.

Trying to remember my early years is like looking through a kaleidoscope with my greasy thumbprint on the lens. But that is sometimes with history. The imagination distorts images based on whatever fancy or feeling strikes the observer now. At times, the image is clear, but the narrative is embellished. Other times, the image and narrative are correct, but the underlying emotion is wrong. Then again, how can we ever tell which part of the story is real or imagined. So, I will spare the reader of my simple tale with too many observations of my youth. I know that I was born on a sunny day filled with marshmallow clouds partly obscuring the beginning of a gloriously colored rainbow. No, that's not right. It was a cloudy grey kind of day with torrential downpours so thick, one can not even see a few feet in front of the naked eye. You see, I have no idea what kind of day it was. I know, according to my birth certificate, that I was born on June seventh, nineteen-hundred and four in a hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. The weather of that particularly painful day is unknown because my father and mother, Karl and Anna Werner respectively, never talked much about the weather. My father, a clerk at Gunther's Trading Company, talked little of mundane things such as the weather. My mother, Anna

Werner, a very progressive woman of the times, ran her own seamstress business from our modest flat in the Bockenheim district. I cannot say that my childhood is very remarkable. I was happy, like most innocent boys and girls of that time. I remember playing tag with my older brother Hans on hazy afternoons when the tutor failed to show for our daily lessons. In hindsight, I suspect that mother and father had a hard time paying for science, math, and piano lessons as the great war came to the forefront of thought. So, the first ten years of life are really a blur of normal boyhood shenanigans of throwing rocks at old Mrs. Konigs salty old German Shepherd and seeing who could piss the farthest off our flats front porch overlooking Wilhelm Avenue. The milkman, Mr. Kline, never failed to look up when passing by our pissing perch.

All playful innocence dissipated like a fog meeting the rising sun, in the year nineteen-hundred and fourteen. Since politics, not the favorite subject of conversation, in the Werner household, I had to learn of the war from our tutor, Mr. Aron Dolmer. I will never forget the man, always smelling of garlic, with his short hunchbacked stature and horn rimmed spectacles, that always slid to the tip of his nose. He would nervously catch his glasses just before falling into his thick salt and pepper bushy mustache. He had a kind face. A fatherly face. The kind of face that revealed a soul pure, kind, and gentle. Completely different than the hard-lined unsmiling face of my father. My father's face depicts the granite chiseled form of the strong Germanic male. But I loved them both, as if each complimented the other, providing me with a balance I still feel blessed to have had in my early years. My mother, the face of an angel. Unblemished like the face of a fine porcelain doll.

“Little Karl,” she would say, with the soft voice of a feather gliding in the soft breeze of our cozy flat. Oh, that’s me by the way. Named after my Father Karl.

“Karl sweetie,” help mommy set the table.

“Karl my dear,” come see the beautiful flowers I picked in the forest this morning.

As you can tell, I was her favorite. My brother Hans loved her too, but he is certainly more independent than me. I wanted to be her baby and stay that way if I could. The horrors of the world can halt at the heavy wooden door of our home, and I can stay in her warm embrace until the end of time itself. She died of cancer when I was just ten years old, one week before I learned of the coming storm of World War One and two weeks to the day I watched the German hero’s marching off to the conquest of Belgium and France.

I will jump ahead presently to where this story begins, but I believe in precision, and story precision involves the dull details of childhood. Very few characteristics of my childhood stand out. The death of my mother, a pin that still pricks carelessly across the surface of my heart, and the parade of warriors marching smilingly into the arms of death.

It must have been getting late, because I remember looking toward the great gardens across the street, mesmerized by the pink tint of the towering pine and oak trees as the sun began its final dissent. From down Wilhelm Avenue I could hear a freight train roaring down the lane, kicking dust into the air like a swarm of millions of angry bees. As the sound approached, I could see the blue, red, and bright green uniforms of the young German soldiers. I use this term

loosely, “German” soldiers, because Germany was not a Nation in the normal sense of the word. Since old mustached and bravado, Wilhelm, came to power, he worked furiously to unite the many independent provinces into one so-called Reich. Not surprisingly, I witnessed the many different brilliantly colored uniforms of individuals, faces glowed with their romanticized perception of war. Even my neighbor Mr. Vogel, waved jubilantly at the passing soldiers, horses, and cannon. Would he be waving if a fortune teller could explain his fate in 1942. You see, he was a homosexual and would die in Mauthausen concentration camp. I know, because I brought his body to the crematorium.

## Chapter II Love at First Sight

Four years of watching as a steady stream of broken bodies and faceless men trickled through my city. We called them the faceless men because they are the ones with missing jaw bones, chins, and sometimes everything but a mouth and a gaping hole where the nose used to be. I worked several hours each day after the trading company in the makeshift hospital, once the city library. I guess it didn’t matter much. I mean who wants to read when life as you know it is coming to an end. The warning signs of defeat flashed steadily in every home, every tavern, and every school since nineteen seventeen. The trenches on both fronts devoured men with impunity, without bias as too age. Boys as young as sixteen and as old as fifty filled the library. Where the works of Aristotle Cicero, and Shakespeare once stood, now boys and men lay bleeding and dying for a war they never agreed to fight. But fight they did for our old Emperor, and for this they paid the ultimate price. I can’t say that I would have been any different. Watching these

ghosts in nineteen fourteen passing me by in the opposite direction, one couldn't help but feel a surge of Nationalistic pride, even if we were not really a Nation. They left in the multicolored uniform representing their respective province and returned in a standard field grey uniform of the Kaisers Reich. A Reich quickly solidified through war, and soon to pay reparations to the victors.

Each day I would care for these men with the same tenderness offered by the female nursing staff. I was just a boy, so there was not a stigma attached to my tender care of the pitiful wounded entering the front doors in droves toward the end of the war. For three years I helped wash the blood-soaked bandages recently taken from the dead to be used again on the dying. As time passed, I graduated to more intricate duties like dressing wounds already black with infection and smelling like rotting cheese. Most would have to go under the knife for amputation. It is true that after caring for so many wounded, and seeing someone alive and talking one minute, but gone to oblivion the next, you become hardened inside. A numbness creeps into your soul like an alien invader and mimicking who you once were. I looked the same, acted the same, and even felt the same, but something goes missing. You just can't cry anymore regardless of what you see. Horror does not hold the same definition anymore. This impersonality gives rise to a disturbing nondiscrimination. You stop asking for someone's name. That is until one day you see that one person who hand delivers you your lost humanity. I was just fourteen at the time, but I was about to have my first hard crush.

His name was Corporal Roland Aust.

“Karl, I need you to clean these bandages and go around and wrap as many wounds as you can see that needs immediate attention,” stated nurse Berlow. She was my favorite out of all the other nurses. She was smart, pretty, and sassy. She reminded me of my mother. The face of an angel with the devil’s wit lurking just below the surface.

“You got it Kitty,” I replied. That was her nickname. I don’t know how she got it, but a cat reference certainly seemed to fit her disposition.

“Oh, and Karl,” she whispered. I followed her eyes as she looked to bed number fifteen, hastily placed somewhere around where the fiction section used to be. When I looked back, she was smiling with a very motherly smile, with maybe just a hint of something I would never see in my Mothers expression, something erotic. She again whispered, “they moved the Corporal to bunk fifteen. Go and make sure he has clean bandages.” She quickly turned away as if knowing I was about to blush, sparing me any more needless embarrassment.

I thought to myself, she knows. She knows my thoughts. She can see my dreams. She must have watched last night as I told Roland how I felt. That I wanted to kiss his soft lips and run my finger gently across the scar on his face and tell him that it will all be Ok. But she couldn’t know such things. I decided that this was all just a part of my imagination.

I was only fourteen, and still very confused about such things as sex. I watched friends exchanging notes and glances with the girls from the neighborhood. I rounded the corner of Berlin Street one afternoon to see my best friend at the time, Hermann Gunther pressed tightly

under an apartment stairwell kissing Gertrude Muller. I believe I saw his hand on her ass, but maybe I was wrong. For me, I always just believed that I was a late bloomer. Maybe asexual, or just plain strange. That is until I watched the stretcher bearers carry in Corporal Roland Aust, the hero of the Western front. At least that's how I imagined him. Math is not my strong point, but it doesn't take a genius to count the number of years that separated us. He was just sixteen, four years ago, as I watched him march off to face the horrors of the Western front. Each night I close my eyes, scanning the eager faces of the young and old marching soldiers, hoping to catch a glimpse of Roland in that sea of multi colored uniforms and shining bayonets. But would I recognize him? The faces of the young boys marching off to war on that crisp autumn day on Wilhelm Avenue. Faces of boys still caught between the states of carefree fanciful pubescence and the unimaginative world of manhood. But this was not the face I was looking at now. His face, like so many others, has aged far beyond the years. These are the eyes of shattered innocence. Eyes that gazed into the stone face of death and lived to tell the tale, even if their story is cut short by the trauma of a broken body, a shattered innocence, and a pulverized soul.

I can see that my own stage of development is not nearly as advanced as my Roland. Despite only six years difference in our age, we may as well have been twenty years apart. As my time involved boyhood pranks and the confusion of a budding realization of my homosexuality, Roland's was one of heroically facing death. At least that is my fantasy. The truth, as I now know, is that everyone who sits at the table of war and willingly, or unwillingly, tastes its tempting fruit, experiences horror, fear, and sorrow. I see the shadow of horror still

imbedded on his beautiful stubbled chin. I see the deep lines of fear forever carved into the prominent structure of his elevated cheeks. I see the sorrow in his piercing blueish green eyes. The kind of sorrow that seeps into a person's soul and forever becomes a part of their fabric. This is the truth of war written on the faces and the soul of every person brave enough to sit at its table.

Well that is enough sentimentality for one day. I know I can never utter these words to the man lying before me. But if I can't, touch his lips as my lover, I will gently dress his wounds and kiss them tenderly in my mind.

## Chapter III Discovery

"Hey Karl, want to take a piss off your balcony?"

Jurgen Schneider is one of my few friends. I don't know why he is my friend. We have so little in common. I like the beauty of nature and art. He likes to kill baby bunnies and wouldn't know a Picasso from his asshole. But nonetheless, he is my friend.

"Not today Jurgen, I just want to sit here awhile," I replied. I really didn't want to just sit here, but I really didn't have an urge to piss off my balcony, or torture Mrs. Koning's German Shepherd. Three years of working in the, makeshift library turned hospital, on Gunther Street, changed me inside. Endless days of changing bandages stained crimson and brown with blood, sweat, and floating particles of dirt. Endless nights of listening to the screams of those refusing to die and the low guttural moans of those accepting their fate, changes a young man. I am just

seventeen, but I have smelled the sickeningly sweet odor of death more times than I can count. I can still smell death sitting here in the fresh breeze of Frankfurt gardens with my only friend, Jurgen Schneider.

"What happened to you Karl? You are no fun anymore," asked Jurgen, looking at me with an expression mixed with wonder and resentment. I felt rage swelling within me like a balloon stretching under the growing pressure. I understand his wonderment of my transformation. I understand his unspoken fear of a potential ending of our friendship. But this did not cause my anger to subside.

I blurted out harshly, "maybe I am just tired of these stupid childish games." I stood up and came within inches of Jurgen's shocked expression. By now the rage was unstoppable. As if watching an actor play his part on an elaborate set, I was no longer in control. I am a mere spectator now. I continued with my tirade. "Maybe Jurgen, I find it hard to play pranks as I watch men without limbs, without faces, without lives stumble along the street aimlessly trapped in the horror of the past. Maybe I am seventeen and feel guilty that I am not among the dead, diseased, and broken. Maybe, just maybe, you should grow the fuck up also."

I would like to lie and say that I felt regret at having said these words to my best friend. But I do not regret my outburst. In fact, looking at his childish dumfounded expression, gives me the urge to pounce on his face. To just let go of years of pent up sorrow…of pent up sexual aggression. I am not a learned man, but I know my feelings and where they originate. Like any person who has lived for any length of time in their own head, I am truly empathetic to my own

sorrow. I missed my crush Roland. I missed caring for his battered body. I missed the feel of running a warm sponge across the hard ripples of his bare stomach. I wanted to die from my loneliness.

"Fine Karl. I don't want to hang out with a fag anyway. Oh yes, we all know your queer, and your world is coming to an end. You and all your freak fag buddies."

As I watched Jurgen walk away toward Gunther Street, kicking at the long blades of dew-covered grass along his way, I felt numb. I felt confused. I felt scared. How can he possibly know what I have been feeling inside all these years? How can he know my deepest secret fantasies swirling above my bed like torturing demons? I began to ask myself questions that I never considered before. Am I a freak? Is my love for another man wrong, immoral, punishable by hell fire, as preached in every church in Germany and, as I imagine, throughout the world? Are my days numbered? I felt a chill pass through my body with this last question. Although there are no signs that homosexuals are to be officially punished, the possibility of such action is not so far fetched in my mind. People are angry since our defeat in war, and when people are angry, they need someone to blame. Will it be those deemed amoral? Will it be Jews?

I sat there under the shade of a large elm with my head resting against its rotted bark. My eyes closed, reliving the past few moments of our falling out, I could feel the back of my head settling gently into a large groove of the bark. I imagined my entire body slowly absorbed into the tree until nothing of my existence is left. My stomach feels heavy like a led weight resting on my bladder. If Jurgen knows about me, then everyone must. I am afraid to open my eyes. I can

feel the stares of the passerby's piercing my mind with their looks of condemnation. Images of hell fire grow steadily out of the blackness in front of my eyes.

"Karl is that you?" came a familiar voice from above. I dared not answer. Is this it? Is this my final judgement? Has Jurgen come back to put me out of misery? The hell fire recedes now and is replaced by an image of Jurgen standing above me with a thick log, ready to bring down on my head scattering bits of bone and bloody meat amongst the dew-covered grass.

The voice repeats its question, "Karl is that you?" Cautiously I open my eyes ready to face the final blow that will send me to the fiery depths of hell. Because isn't that what we have been taught is the destination of those who don't fit in.

"Roland, its you!" I exclaimed, but immediately regretting my response. This was nothing like my nightly fantasy of meeting him again. In that lucid dream state, I embrace him tenderly felling his hard muscles under the softness of my fingertips. So, I tried again.

"Corporal Aust, so good to see your not dead." I replied. This responsewas worse than the last, and I instantly regretted it.

My mind went to immediate ease as I observed a soft kind-hearted smile take shape from his rose-colored full lips. My heart leapt as I watched the tip of his tongue gently roll across his upper lip, as he sat down close enough to feel his warmth merge with mine.

"I heard what just happened with your friend," he stated looking away so as not to cause any more undo embarrassment.

What a polite and considerate man I thought to myself. Does he not know that not only the immediate past was blurred by his arrival, but the entire past and infinite future is obliterated into nothingness with just his presence.

"Oh that," I stated, trying to brush it off like I did not know what Jurgen was talking about when he called me a fag. "That was nothing. That was just Jurgen being his usual dumb self."

We sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity but was only a matter of minutes. I was not taken off guard by the realization that with anyone else in the world, such a silence would be maddeningly unbearable, but with him, I could sit in silence forever.

"You know Karl, I was awake every time you visited me at the hospital."

My heart continued its rapid thud beating a hole through my chest like a hammer. Could he possible of heard me whisper how I loved him? Could he possibly know how my heart ached for him through long cold nights of confusion, passion, and rage?

Before I could speak, he continued, "Its not safe to talk here. Follow me."

We did not walk too far, just to the other end of the park. Here next to a white porcelain bird bath is an old wooden park bench. Nothing in this park is very much cared for and the bench

reflects the changing priorities since the end of the war. Grass grows wildly where at one time was neatly trimmed to just the proper aesthetic height. Trees grow until limbs are brushing unnaturally against the disproportioned grass, where at one time, a gardener gave great care with his art of trimming and pruning. This bench, once painted a brilliantly bright red, now peeling paint like a leper peeling patches of skin from a diseased and frail body. None of that mattered. We were alone, in an isolated part of the garden, and my dream was about to come true.

"I heard you Karl. I heard you profess your love for me. I have a confession. I was of the mind to grab your throat and squeeze as tight as I could feeling the righteousness well up inside me, like a good German doing his duty."

He paused, giving me enough time for the tears to well up behind my eyes. I am alone, I thought to myself. Is there no one else like me in this world?

He continued, "But then I felt your touch Karl. I felt your soft caring hands glide across my skin. No revulsion at my wounds came from those beautiful hands Karl. I realized that I was beginning to fall in love with you."

He came closer to my lips with his. I could feel the warm moistness of his mouth touching mine before we even touched. He placed his hand on the back of my head and pulled my closer until our lips finally met. He held me there for a long time, as I drifted into a euphoria, I never thought existed in such a concrete world of hatred, war, and prejudice. I will never forget

that moment, as well as, the ending of that moment, because all things are impermanent. Happiness as well as sadness have the seeds of destruction sown into their very fabric.

"Hey faggots!" came the voice of Jurgen Schneider from across the park.

"Yea, here we go. Gonna kill some fags today," came another familiar voice. This was the voice of Peter Luther. He is about my age, seventeen, but built like a concrete house. His days, since I can remember, have consisted of lifting bales of hay from sun up to sun down. I am not even certain if Roland could take them.

"Run Karl," stated Roland, as he gave me a light push off the tattered bench.

"I'm staying with you, I replied," noticing the strain of concern in my voice. I was not concerned for my own safety. ALL I could think of was him.

He grabbed me by the shoulders and kissed me quickly on the lips and said, "I can take care of them. I will come for you later. Its not worth getting yourself hurt. Now go!"

I reluctantly began to run in the direction of the oncoming boys. I looked back as I was running and watched as Roland gave a right hook to Jurgen's face. As if in slow motion, I could see a spray of blood with what looked like tiny white shards flying through the air, as Jurgen laid motionless on the grass. I ran some more still watching the fight and tripped, feeling my legs elevated off the ground. My head hit something hard and sharp sending stabbing pain into my vibrating skull. I picked myself up feeling dazed by the blow to my head. Warm sticky blood

trickled from my head causing thick clots to form in my disheveled hair. I looked and saw Peter lying next to Jurgen, both motionless in the red stained grass. I immediately changed direction staggering toward Roland, now sitting on the decrepit park bench. He looked back at me giving me a signal with his right arm to stay back. It was apparent that his left arm, the arm I delicately bandaged and re bandaged in the hospital all those many months before, was injured again and hanging heavily to his side. I stopped just in time to see three policemen in the standard blue buttoned uniform and spiked helmet running toward Roland. I ran like a coward. I ran because I knew that although homosexuals were not persecuted in public, the dreaded paragraph 175 was in force, and gay prisoners did not fair well in German prisons. Is this the last time I would see him? My heart ached at the thought.

You see, all happiness and all sadness end abruptly.

## Chapter IV Betrayal: The First of Two Accidental Murders

So, I ran and ran, and didn't stop until my lungs burned with each inhale of stale city air. My mind raced, filled with the customary adrenaline-fueled narratives of doom and gloom. Head bent below my waist, hands on my knees, and stagnant air locked inside my burning lungs, visions raced through my mind. I saw the police already at my house speaking to my Father.

"Well sir," stated the Reich officer, with head held low in embarrassment, "I'm sorry to report that your son was caught kissing a man in the park." Now he places his spiked helmet on

his head, straightens his body, and puts on a face of stern German professionalism and continues, "I'm sorry to say that he is violation of paragraph 175, and will have to face a German court."

You see, everyone knows about paragraph 175. Enacted on May 15, 1871, paragraph 175 makes sex between two men illegal. This is something every German boy learns by ten years of life in either school or by his tutor. It doesn't seem to dawn on people that if a law like this was thought of by lawmakers, then homosexuality is not some strange freak occurrence. We wouldn't make a law against stealing if only a handful of people in the world were caught stealing. No, we create laws to prevent behavior and actions that make the government and the church afraid. But I was not engaging in such philosophical masturbation as I was gasping for life's breath on the corner of Ada street and Wilhelm Avenue. I was watching a sad movie play out in my mind. A movie that features the shame of my Father, my brother, and my possible detention. For what? For falling in love. For experiencing my first innocent kiss? For being human?

With frightful visions of prison and shame stabbing my brain, I ran home. I made a heroic decision to tell my Father the truth. Maybe if he hears it from me, he can look into my eyes, seeing his own, and having mercy on his flesh and blood. Not only his flesh and blood, but those of my Mother, the woman he once loved in life, and now mourns in death.

A description of my running up my flats stairs is not necessary. Just think of a dog trotting down the street in the middle of July with swollen tongue hanging off the side of its mouth, dripping watery saliva in anticipation of a cool drink. I burst through my door like a madman, "Dad, the police are comi….

I was stopped dead in my tracks by my brothers' firm grasp on my sweat soaked undershirt. I long discarded the heavy sweater I wore that day to the park.

"Don't say a word Karl, I'm doing the talking," he stated, as he dragged me into the small dimly lit room we shared as a bedroom. But I mainly stayed there alone. My brother was four years older than me and spent most of his time active in a local political party, the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). The NSDAP is a newly formed right-wing political party made up mostly of unemployed soldiers, young folks looking for a cause, and basically anyone with a taste for radicalism and violence. The party, as I was told, was based out of Berlin and headed by a young orator by the name of Adolf Hitler, but this is as much as I know. Anyway, my brother Hans is a member of the brown shirted group, and never home. I guess after the war, even our large city feels like sitting in a cardboard box.

"Karl, I know about the park," he continued. I felt his grasp get tighter and his eyes narrow into those of a great tiger ready to pounce.

I had to act fast. Roland wasn't here to protect me, and I am far from a man of violent action. I said, "Hans, I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but how can I tell anyone something like this in this town?" I allowed my self-pity and defeat to rise steadily to my eyes. His grasp loosened, and his gaze returned mine with that understanding only known between siblings.

"Karl, I'm not mad at you. I know you were hypnotized by that queer. We have been told about such things by our party leader Hermann Mayer."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Hypnotized? Did he say hypnotized? What's next I thought, is he going to throw me naked in the shower and scrub me with lye to get the infection off me. The rage welled up inside me like a volcano ready to spew forth its fiery death. But I resisted the urge to fight ignorance with even more ignorant aggression. I felt sorry for my brother. My family could only afford for one of us to have tutored lessons. He is nothing more than the product of a youth spent learning on the street.

But I couldn't resist at least a little jab at his deluded mind.

"So, what are you going to tell me next Hans. Huh…maybe that the Jews are turning everyone gay." I started to laugh, closed my eyes, and waited for the punch, but nothing came accept laughter. He is laughing. I can't believe it. I opened my eyes and noticed that although he is still gripped tightly on my shirt, he was smiling and laughing.

"Karl, I don't believe everything I hear from the party. The Jews are nothing like the rats depicted in the party newspaper. But what you are doing is different. The new Germany will need babies. Lots of babies to replace our losses on the front. There is no room for those who cannot contribute."

"So, Hans, will you turn me in to the police. Will you turn me over to your brown shirted stormtrooper buddies?"

"No Karl, but we are going to the police station. You are going to tell them that you were hypnotized by Roland. He seduced you. You are young and cannot be blamed for that kiss. You

are going to do this, or I will turn you over to my friends. I will not have you destroy my only chance to be something in this life. Remember Karl, you were given the education, while I was put to the side."

I want to resist him with every fiber in my body, with every once of fight I have left, but he was right. The thought of abandoning Roland made me want to die. But this bastard was right. I owe him everything now.

"I will do this, but we are no longer brothers after this one. You hear me! I yelled with my hot breath and reddened face just inches from his. I owe you nothing after this you brown shirted pig."

I could see the anger hot beneath the surface. His eyes turned the blackest of coal, and I felt genuinely in fear of my life. But the death blow did not come. A sinister smile creeped across his face as he stated, "that's fine Karl. Oh, one more thing. If you live in this city, you will have a girlfriend. You don't have to touch her fairy boy, but you will put on a show, for the sake of our family name." "Her name is Ada Mayer, and she will be at the house for dinner tonight."

Walking to the police station with my brother, feeling less than Judas, I could not have realized in my most fantastical nightmares that I would commit two murders before fleeing to Berlin. I have heard rumors of the wonderful nightclubs playing a new type of music, I think called jazz. Nightclubs that never shut down. Places of dancing, music, and freedom to pursue one's sexuality with absolute freedom. The world is in chaos. People are starving, there are no

jobs, the government is in collapse, and people need diversion. In Berlin, the capital, alcohol, music, and sex are the pastime of those needing a rest from the brutal realities of the day. I even heard of men and women experimenting with what I would call, gender swapping. There is a rumor that a few men have had surgery to change gender. Personally, I am happy being a man, but how wonderful to meet people of my own thinking. But all of this would have to wait for the right opportunity. Today, I must condemn my first and only love to his death. I did not believe that he would be executed. However, kissing another man under the age of twenty-one is in direct violation of paragraph 175. He will surely spend many years in prison under the harshest conditions. It would better if I was forced to shoot him on the spot and turn the gun on myself afterwards. So yes, that March the tenth, nineteen twenty-one, I committed my first of two, accidental murders.

"Ahhh, my friend Hans Werner, what brings you to our station," asked a tall lanky man wearing the black uniform of the criminal police. He stood up and I can see for the first time how tall he was. He must be at least six foot five, with golden blonde hair with the dark blue piercing eyes of a doll…brilliant but lifeless.

"I am here to speak to the inspector concerning an incident in Gunther Park today," said my brother in a whisper to denote the need for strict confidentiality, because nobody else was at the front desk. This dramatic gesture had its effect as the policeman immediately picked up the phone and, in an equal whispering tone, talked into the phone.

"You may go up to see inspector Heonrich Muller, room 110."

I must admit I was impressed that my brother knew the tall man at the front desk, I surmised that he must be a fellow member in the workers party.

“Come in gentleman, and have a seat,” came the voice from behind the large neatly varnished Walnut desk. The man sitting behind the bureaucratic monstrosity was in stark contrast to the policeman we just met. This man was short, no more than five foot four, dark brown hair quickly receding and leaving a small comical bald spot on the back of his head. He was not neatly shaved with a big bushy mustache and an odorous hint of tobacco on his breathe.

“So, what can I do for you,” he stated, as he looked directly at me. He would not even look at Hans. I was in this alone. This is fitting I thought, betrayal is a lonely business.

What came out of my mouth next will haunt me forever. I will die a thousand deaths before the end because of a just three sentences.

“I was hypnotized by a homosexual in the park, he kissed me, he beat up two boys Jurgen Schneider and Peter Luther. I escaped and immediately ran home to tell my brother what happened. His name is Corporal Roland Aust.”

The inspector smiled at me, turned and smiled at my brother and said, “Well that is enough for me. You may go young men. This case is closed.”

We walked home in silence, knowing that our sibling relationship was at an end. I hated him, but more, I hated myself. I am no different than the brown shirted thugs who march down the German streets hating everything that is pure and good.

## Chapter V Denial

I spent the rest of that day alone in my room judging time by absently watching the shadows creep across the bedroom walls. After returning from the police station, I ran to this very room, locking the door, and falling on my bed. I can't even think. Only the past remains in this room of dirty yellow cracked walls. All is silent accept for the occasional banging and creaking of the radiator expanding under the heat and pressure within its coils. With each bang I am brought back to earlier events of the day. The time just after I sealed the fate of my last love, Roland. As we were leaving the inspectors office, my brother slammed the door hard behind us. I jumped when I heard that noise because just at that same time, I was thinking of Roland being forced into a prison cell and the bars slamming loudly, sealing him inside his tomb. That's how I imagine it may feel to him at this very moment; like a lonely dusty tomb.

There goes the shadow changing position again, darkening the top half of my brother's poster situated just opposite the window, looking out onto Wilhelm Avenue. The poster is of a tall blonde German youth with a sledgehammer of sorts hanging over his shoulder. The youth has a dirty workers cap on his head and is looking at the viewer with what I can only describe as

intense purpose. The caption reads, Frontsoldaten (Steel Helmet, League of Front Soldiers). Under this caption is the word HITLER in bold red letters. More angry rhetoric from a nation of unemployed hungry soldiers returning to a world that no longer makes sense.

Judging by the position of the shadow, I would say it is just two hours until dinner, and my forced coupling with Ada Mayer. My stomach grows hot and sickly with the thought. Yes, I can smell the sweet meaty aroma of sauerbraten and goulash, my brother has been hard at work making for this occasion. My Father will be home soon from a hard day at the trading company. Although the war has brought devastation to Europe and people are starving on the streets, our little family has done well enough. However, I suspect that the beef in savory goulash dishes this evening will have horsemeat as a substitute for prime beef. Nonetheless, you are only repulsed by a dish if you are made aware of its ingredients. I am at least thankful for having food to eat. I wonder what Roland will be eating in prison. No, no, I must get this out of my mind or I will go mad.

As I set up in my bed trying to push thoughts of Roland out of mind, I began to fantasize, or maybe hallucinate is a better word for such vivid images. I learned once of indigenous cultures in Africa, Asia, and early America using naturally growing plants and herbs to induce spiritual hallucinations. Is it possible that strong emotion and isolation can bring on such experiences? But without a drug, mine were not spiritual in nature at all. Every time I closed my eyes and tried to push away the events of the day, violent images flashed in front of the darkness

behind my eyes. Images of killing my brother, the inspector, and even that young handsome officer at the front desk. Will I ever get over my darkening depression and white-hot rage?

## Chapter VI An Empty Encounter

I am going to spare all the boring details of dinner, my meeting Ada Meyer, and all the fake joy surrounding that table of lies. Only a few observations deserve scant mention. For example, my Father straining under the tremendous effort to smile, as his loneliness and discontent boiled steadily beneath the surface. The false hope of my brother rambling about like a naïve schoolboy declaring, "Germany will rise again under the leadership of Herr Hitler!" Despite the signs of impending doom that permeated the very air we daily breathe. Finally, we come to the biggest falsity of the evening. I smiled. She smiled. I laughed. She laughed. Our eyes met and still I believe that she was too dense to notice my indifference to her fake charms. She is pretty enough. Any man or woman could see her beauty. The ideal picture of the young German woman. Although only seventeen, like myself, she is tall. She must have me beat by three inches at least, and she is all legs. Long curly blonde hair, the color of golden corn silk, that touched the middle of her petite, yet, strong shoulders. Her cheek bones prominent like my brothers, but not rounded and plain like my own. She would make a wonderful dutiful little baby maker for my brother Hans.

I will also spare you a detailed description of her taking my virginity just an hour after that dinner in our flat's basement. I will defer a detailed description because, for me, the act was reduced to the emptiness of just a moment of pleasure…then nothingness. My fantasies of

making love to Roland were filled with bliss that surpassed the limited boundaries of brief physical pleasure. My daydreams of lying in bed with Roland after making love…talking, holding, and sleeping in the comfort of each other's warmth, gave feelings of pleasure that lasted throughout many lonely days…a refuge in good times and bad. At least I can say for my sexual experience with a woman, I learned that it could never bring happiness and peace of mind. All I could think about the entire time, which seemed to drag on for an eternity, was Roland's kiss. But Roland is gone, and I must move on. I can only hope to find love again before my time is at an end.

## Chapter VII Lonliness

The next two years, 1921 to 1923, trudged on painfully, as it tends to do when the participant is not particularly fond of events. I think of those years in relation to an orchestral production I was forced to attend when I was just nine, one year before watching the walking dead march off to war. The Berlin orchestra was in town and playing at the Frankfurt Auditorium on Reichstag Boulevard. The auditorium was nice enough with its plush red velvet seats, red wall to wall carpeting, and neatly polished stage. The room was packed that night, at least seven thousand in attendance. People from all walks of life attended, but mainly the upper and middle classes. The poor, the majority, do not generally find the classical works of Richard Wagner that appealing to digest. This is not good old-fashioned snobbery I am talking. In fact, I find that today, I would much rather the murky vomit stained depths of the beer cellar much more satisfying to the senses than a high culture event. Even on a happy social occasion, the cultural

elite must strain under the pressure of adhering to the unspoken principles socially acceptable behavior. I remember straining that night just to keep myself from falling asleep, and I had my Mothers sharp elbow jabbing into my ribs to remind me that even a nine-year-old boy had to keep up appearances.

But it is not only boredom that slowed time, making two years feel as if four. The worst part of that life period was living a lie. For two years I divided my time working at the trading company, watching my Father rapidly age and die of heart failure, and avoiding Ada Myer as much as possible. Not that there was anything wrong with Ada. She was a normal young lady with the same hopes and dreams of any young woman in Germany. She wanted to break free from this town. She wanted to see the world but not through a lens of war-torn poverty and struggle. I felt sorry for her in many ways. After making love she would lay her head on my chest and talk sleepily about things that she could only read about in books. She would speak of the rolling emerald hills of Ireland, the hot rolling sands of Egypt, and the rolling waves off then Western coast of the United States. Always rolling this or rolling that as if she visited these places before. Maybe she had in a countless number of dreams trapped inside her head as she lay next to me at night. I felt sorry for her because she does not know how alone, she is. Everyone is born, lives, and dies alone, but at least if you have someone to love, you live and die alone in the comforting illusion of togetherness. Sometimes I do not know which is better. To live an illusion and face suffering as that illusion falls apart, or live the truth of aloneness, and accept suffering

as a natural part of human existence. Either way, one day I will shatter her illusion, and tell her the truth about me, but for now, I must honor my brother and keep the flame of her illusion alive.

## Chapter VIII Decision

The time of coming out to Ada was not how I planned a countless time before in my daydreams at the Trading Company, or idle nights alone at the family flat. I daydreamed a thousand times over explaining to Ada my sexuality, that I was sorry to her, and would always remain the best of friends. The scenario ended differently each time. Sometimes she would hug me and tell me everything was as it should be, just before affirming our eternal friendship. Other times she slapped me hard, crying as she stormed out the bedroom door. But in my dreams, she killed me every time. Revolver, knife, bludgeoning. A dozen different ways to die, and I suffered them all. None of this happened of course. Even worse than reliving the past, is holding on to any definitive outcome of the future. The future never works out as planned because we are never the same person then as we are now. This principle of constant change is, I am convinced, a universal truth governing g all life; however, sometimes events so outrageous and beyond control, change who we are in the present. Murder, even accidental will surely change an individual, and on November fifth, nineteen-twenty-three, murder solved my problem of deciding when I was to leave Ada Myer, my brother Hans, the Trading company, and everything I knew as “my world.”

## Chapter IX Turning Point

"Karl, go to Mrs. Frieser's house and clean out the basement of her flat. She is old, and has nobody to do it for her," stated my brother, as he hurriedly left our flat on his no doubt to a Nazi SA meeting. His meetings were becoming more frequent now. I had a strange uneasy feeling that something violent was in the air. There were several clashes between Nazi SA brownshirts and Communist agitators. The economy in Frankfurt is picking up but this seems to only agitate the various political factions in Germany. Nightly news stories of clashes in Munich and Berlin indicate a growing restlessness in society, and Frankfurt is not immune.

Mrs. Frieser is very old. She is a good friend of the family, and my Father when alive, would often send us boys to help her in times of need. Life is hard enough without having to shovel snow, paint your flat, carry your groceries and clean out your own basement, when you are ninety-two. So, I was glad to go help the old lady.

"Now make sure you sweep good Karl, I don't want any rats making a nest down there," stated Mrs. Freiser, as I was walking out her door with broom and dustpan in hand. I could hear her calling after me with some more useless instruction as I walked down her basement stairs.

"And don't forget to lock the door after you have finished. I will give you some money in a few weeks."

"Ok Mrs. Freiser, I called back. I won't forget."

So, without another thought or, care of any kind of compensation for the work, I began cleaning her basement. The room itself is no bigger than twenty feet square. I remember thinking

how quickly I will be done and on my way for another evening of play acting with Ada. I was looking at an old coo cuckoo clock sitting in the far corner of the unlit room. The only lighting came from the natural sunlight of the half-opened cellar door. A beam of yellow sunlight, laced with swirling clouds of kicked up dust, shone steadily on the slanted roof of the clock. This was a seventeenth century design created by the Black Forest Clockmakers. I could not fathom why such an antique would be sitting so alone and neglected in the darkened tomb of a basement. I wondered, poetically, if this ray of light was the first to touch the still shined varnish of the clocks face. Two small doors are seated at the clocks top, ready to open at twice twelve each day, to display the cuckoo bird extended, I imagine, on a small wooden peg (the perch). I knew this was an expensive antique, because the wheel apparatus of the piece was carved of wood, and not brass. What a shame, I thought, that such an antique may never again grace someone's silent lonely room.

"Hey fag, you thought you were going to get away with your shit," came the familiar voice of Peter Luther. But this time he sounded a bit off, as if he had cotton stuffed deep into his flaring nostrils. I could hear the homicidal rage just under the surface, but I dared not turn around. My brain instinctively searched frantically for something to defend myself. I was not strong like Roland. This was a contest I was about to lose, and by the guttural sound of his voice, death will be the price paid by the vanquished.

Just as I forced the courage to turn around, having dispelled any notion of finding a suitable weapon to aid in my inevitable escape, I felt solid muscle wrap tightly around my throat,

like a boa tightly contracting its muscles to paralyze its prey. My world became fuzzy. I lost all auditory sensation except for a faint ringing in my left ear. My right seemed completely blocked. I could not exhale the breath I gasped the moment I felt the muscles tighten against my throat. I believe, although I am still unsure, but I think I felt Peter fully erect as he pressed his body tightly against mine. The world grew darker and I knew I must act. I reached for the antique clock that I was admiring just a moment ago and put it to good use. With clock in hands I threw my arms upward and back as hard as my oxygen deprived muscles would allow. I did not hear the scream, but I suppose there was one, for Mrs. Freiser called from the top of the stairs, "Karl is everything ok down there. Should I come down?"

I quickly came to my senses and replied in a shaky hoarse voice, "I'm fine. I just tripped on some wood."

There was a moment pause. I was not even concerned about looking behind me for Peter. I assumed he had fled with a busted nose, and nothing more than a wounded pride.

"Ok then. When you are finished just make sure to lock the door. I am going out for a spot of tea with the ladies."

I felt a wave of relief come over my body, or maybe this was just the warm sensation of oxygen rich returning its normal course. In any case, my relief quickly turned to horror as I turned to see Peter laying in a sticky dark red pool of his own blood. I could not believe that I hit him that hard, and I was correct in this original assumption. I can only assume that Peter received

a serious concussion from his encounter with Roland in the park. I must have caused his unhealed head wound to worsen, but this was two years ago. Possibly an aneurism. I almost rushed out the door in my panic, intent on informing the police, but luckily came to my senses just a few feet outside the cellar door. The moment of pure sunshine, devoid of dirt, floating dust, and the smell of damp and newly spilled blood, felt liberating. My initial reaction was to just run. Leave the body and run stupid, I thought. But this would not be logical. Despite the poor quality of detectives in that day and age, finding a link between Peters body and my bloody hand would not take a flash of insightful genius. I would never make it to Berlin. I frantically searched the basement and found a rust stained shovel in the corner opposite of where I found the antique clock, now shattered to pieces on the floor.

The next several hours consisted of wrestling with my conscience with each shovel full of dirt I placed in the shallow grave. The dirt floor of the basement was loose and easy to shovel. With little effort I managed to dig a grave at least four feet deep, six feet in length, and three feet in width. I was numb and tired, and as the hours sailed by, I thought more of Roland. I would be leaving him soon for, what I sadly surmised, the very last time. At least two hundred and seventy miles will separate Roland and myself, but even if I did go to prison for this crime, there is no guarantee that I would reside in the same prison, let alone the same cell. If there were even the most miniscule possibility of living with Roland, even behind bars, I would turn myself in immediately, but I am not certain Roland is even alive. It is common knowledge that many homosexuals die in prison from, shall we say, unnatural causes. The officer on watch will simply

list the death as a coronary, despite the prisoner being in his prime. The thought of running to the station and simply describing the act as self-defense, which it was, would do no good. This was the only way, at least the only way to ensure my own continued survival.

There came a point during all of this shoveling that I thought I saw the first layer of thin dirt I shoveled into the hole rise and fall with respiration, but I dismissed this as a hallucination brought upon by guilt. Could he have been alive as I shoveled in the cold dirt? I could not think about this anymore. I had a train to freedom to catch.

## Chapter X Working for the Ford Motor Company

I didn't leave for the train station immediately following the burial in old Mrs. Feiser's basement. It is a funny thing…the mind. With the flames of adrenalin fueled by fear of losing one's freedom or, life, other higher emotions are placed in a reserve status. As the fear subsides, the mind is active once again, and when the mind is active, the higher emotions of guilt and sadness reign supreme. This is what happened to me. My muscles were burning from my tireless digging and my mind was swollen with guilt sadness. The former because of my strong held belief that all life, no matter how repulsive, deserve to live. The latter because I was leaving the only world I have ever known behind.

After an hour of rest and washing the blood and dirt from between my fingers from a bucket I found filled with stagnant water, I resigned myself to go home and pack a small bag. The trains in Frankfurt run day and night. Our little city has expanded since the ending of the

war. Doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers, political leaders, corner groceries, the unemployed, and the aimless have expanded across Germany. News on the street is that the German economy is growing. France does not seem so interested, or able, to collect the outrageous reparations placed on Germany after the war.

Between January and June 1919, France forced Germany to sign the Treaty of Versailles. Germany was stripped of its overseas colonies, lost large portions of land to France and Poland, and expected to pay for much of the property destruction from the war. However, by 1923, under pressure from Britain and America, France scaled back on some of the more damaging provisions. So, I accepted this knowledge as the primary cause for the improved economic conditions of today, and this increase in economic affairs allows the Frankfurt trains to be in full swing.

I was relived to see that my flat was unoccupied. Ada was still at work at Mr. Hoffman's Grocery on Hamburg Plaza, not a very profitable store because Mr. Hoffman is very generous with giving credit. Ada told me one night that Mr. Hoffman gave a less than altruistic view of giving people groceries on credit. She recalled him saying, "let them eat on credit, because when times are good again, allot of people are going to owe me big time. Maybe the mayor ship of Frankfurt is in my immediate future,"

I can't say I blame him. Nothing in this life is free, not even freedom itself. The price of war for the Keiser is a smashed economy and a politically divided people. The price of

acceptance is betraying whom you are. The price of a kiss is loss of freedom for one, death in a dirt floored basement for another, and a ticket for a seat on a train…everything has a price.

I reached the station at four thirty that afternoon. The station was not very crowded since the average work day did not end until five thirty in the evening. I was hoping to catch the five O clock train to Berlin. I had plenty of money saved from working as much overtime as I possibly could the past several years. In hindsight, which is always clear as crystal, overwork is sure anecdote for avoidance of the uncomfortable. Some take refuge in intoxication or the temporary bliss of sex, and some take refuge from misery with overwork. Ada's touch and my brothers' control are the source of my suffering.

"I would like one second class ticket to Berlin. I believe the train departs at five," I stated, with one arm resting on the ticket booth counter as I looked slowly around the station. I must have looked so mysterious peering around the station that day, but a sense of dread permeated my soul. Dreams certainly end sometimes when is just at the horizon of perceived bliss.

"Sorry young man. That train is delayed. Word is that another clash between Communist and Social Democrats erupted throughout Berlin. Tor up some of the damn track, someone did," he stated, looking at me suspiciously over his pez nez glasses.

What else could be said accept, "thank you, I will come back in an hour to buy a ticket."

I sat down on a hard-wooden bench outside the station. The time is five already and Ada will soon be leaving work. We are supposed to meet at my flat for supper. My brother arranged

this supper. He would not say, but he had some grand announcement to make. When I am not there, Ada at least, will come look for me. Eventually she will come to the station.

Just as I was summoning the courage to walk the two hundred and seventy miles to Berlin, hitchhiking along the way, my thoughts were disturbed by a deep voice, speaking German but with an accent I never heard before.

"Hello young man. Let me introduce myself. I am Thomas Rhodes of the Ford Motor Company."

He extended a large black leather gloved hand peeking from a tan overcoat that extended just below the knees. His coat was open, and I could see a very expensive looking pinstriped suit, navy blue in color, and a baby blue silk shirt just visible above the collar bone. He wore a black hat with the rim curled upward on both sides. I believe Americans referred to this type of hat as a Derby. His face is not very remarkable in any way. An average face with a small brownish red mustache extending from one corner of the mouth to the other.

"Hello sir," I replied. It is nice to meet you."

I was not particularly pleased to be talking to anybody. My mind was occupied.

"I like your face young man."

He must know I thought. Picking up male prostitutes at a busy train station was not as uncommon as one might think. Even Frankfurt has an underground of outcasts, including gay men, but prostitution is normally a nocturnal activity.

"I'm sorry sir, but you may have the wrong," …

He stopped me, probably to spare me the obvious embarrassment of misinterpreting a situation.

"Of course, I don't have the wrong idea. You have the perfect face for an associate of the Ford Motor Company. Let me explain myself. I have been sent on a mission by my superiors back in America. Germany is about to become profitable once again, and my boss likes to take advantage of opportunities, and your nation is an opportunity."

I didn't quite understand what he was talking about. His German was not very good, but that was not the problem. I never heard of Ford, and still was not very interested. Time was running out and I needed to make my move before it was too late.

"How about you work for me. I will pay your lodging and ten dollars per day. On your part, you be my interpreter, change our wheels when necessary, and to be honest, just keep a lonely traveler company along the way."

I was still unsure of what was expected of me, but this was an opportunity not to be missed. I had a ride to Berlin, or as close as possible, a generous working wage, and free lodging.

This opportunity would never come again. So, I said goodbye one last time as I followed Mr. Rhodes of the Ford Motor Company to his car, a closed shiny black automobile with a grey plush interior.

The ride to Berlin was a long but quite interesting journey, even for a youth burning with energy and ambition. Endless miles past, driving on roads sometimes paved but more often unfinished, course, and rocky. I am thrilled to be on the road. Every mile driven is another mile further from my past, and with each spent gallon of petrol, another pint of homesickness spilled along the dirt roadway. Oh yes, I am homesick. The first day on the road I contemplated going back. Even if the familiar is less than ideal, even downright brutal, it is still the familiar, and the familiar is like a wool blanket on a frost-bitten January morning. But time really does heal wounds, or maybe just covers them with a temporary bandage. In either case, there is no turning back now.

Earning my daily wage is not easy. With a backseat full of spare tires, petrol, and grease, I am in a constant supply of necessary material for an estimated ten-day trip. With each stop, I am to change a tire if needed, grease the axles and other moving parts of the engine, of which I do not even know the names, and fill the tank full. We stopped in several small villages along the journey, and very close to the city of Kassel.

“I received news of some interesting events that have taken place in Munich just yesterday,” stated Mr. Rhodes.

Without giving me time to answer, he continued, “it would seem that an attempted coup has taken place in Munich.” He looked over at me briefly being not one to take his eyes off the road for long and continued his reporting. “A young man by the name of Adolf Hitler and a group of German Workers Party members (SA stormtroopers) attempted to storm several government buildings in the cities center. According to reports, Hitler and about 3000 followers had a showdown with 100 armed police. Several people killed and the Nazi’s disbanded, with many arrested.” Well that’s all I know, but I do hope this does not interfere with business.

I felt angry at first with this last statement concerning business, but then I viewed the situation from his viewpoint. Here is a foreigner in a strange war-torn land. I did not blame him for not understanding the humiliation and anger felt by so many German citizens. I did not agree with the Nazi stance on Jews. Over the past two years listening to my brother talk across the dinner table, I had a clear understanding of his party’s official policy on Jews and homosexuals. Concerning Jews, Hitler made clear early on that the Jews were the cause of Germanys defeat. How ridiculous a statement and yet many began to believe him. Concerning homosexuals, not much was said in those early years, other than a few remarks concerning immorality. The official view was that homosexuals were corrupted, probably by Jews, but there was a hope for a cure. What tat cure was, was never talked about in speeches. My brother let slip one night that a very large proportion of SA leaders and members engaged in sex acts with fellow members. The hypocrisy of life never fails to amuse me.

There is little to say concerning the rest of the trip. We had many successes along the way showcasing the new Ford Model T for potential widespread sale in a better Germany. The cost of one car was currently four hundred and fifteen American dollars. Very few Germans could afford such a price, but I was beginning to see Mr. Ford as a certified genius. If he could have his automobile massed produced with funds from a friendly democratic government in Germany, the future revenues would be astonishing. Mr. Rhodes would often stare in front of the road while driving and speak about a day when every citizen of Europe and America owned an automobile. Although skeptical of such a futuristic world, I politely nodded my agreement and stated how wonderful that will be.

So here we are in Berlin after ten days on the road, and I have more than enough money to rent a flat, find work, and live my life on my own terms…free and happy. How was I to know that political events could ever thwart such modest ambitions as personal freedom and happiness.

## Chapter XI Finding a Place

What can be said about the next ten years in Berlin. As with every life, I was sometimes king, and sometimes pauper. The economy was sometimes good, and sometimes poor. Public acceptance of this and that was sometimes accepting, and sometimes downright intolerant. But through it all, as street politicians fought and maneuvered their pawns, as the poor starved and the rich became richer and the world seemed to forget the horrors of the first part of the century, I managed to weather the storm. I feel very fortunate for my job as a bartender at the El Dorado club. This is the premier club of the exciting Berlin nightlife. People from all over Germany and

Europe come to the club to forget the outside world and let their inhibitions fade, even for just one night. I found a home here, and I found love once again.

I met Alberich Frost in 1923, just two years after my road trip with Mr. Rhodes, of the Ford Motor Company, ended. We arrived in Berlin and after receiving my fifty-dollar bonus and commission, I quickly set out to rent a flat and find employment. The discovery of so many gay men in the apartment complex I stayed, was a blessing. Within just days of my arrival to the city, I was given a tip by Erwin Fux, whom lived just across the hall, that the El Dorado was a gay and lesbian bar, and always looking for new bartenders. I knew nothing of bartending but, as I learned later, very few applicants knew anything of bartending. I guess it didn't hurt that during my interview the head bartender, Alberich, took a fancy to me, and I him. He reminded very much of Roland in appearance, and we began a passionate love affair shortly after my hiring. A detailed description of our first encounter is not necessary. The bar closed, we talked, we drank, and made love all the rest of that early morning. This is a pattern that continued for ten years. Although we were in love, we made a commitment…not too be committed. We were young and wanted to experience life to its fullest. We were freefalling in a world that was spinning out of control. A world breaking the shackles of Christian backed Prussian morals. People did not want commitment, but they did want order. So, it is no surprise that in 1933, the Nazis came to power with the election of their Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler. Personally, I avoided any dabbling in politics throughout the years before the rise of the Nazis to power. I avoided street politics, not out of any dulling of political interest, but only out of necessity. The body I buried in Frankfurt was always

on the forefront of my thoughts, particularly at night. I would spend many sleepless nights listening to Alberich's soft breathe and reliving the events of that day in Mrs. Frieser's basement. I heard of an American writer, Poe I believe was his name, who wrote a story about the beating heart of a dead man. Very strange story, but one that hit home. The story goes something like a man kills another man out of jealousy. Man buries the other man's body under the floorboards of his house. Killer is tortured by the sound of a heartbeat, the sound of the murdered mans heartbeat. Well I never read the story, but I remember hearing about it. I must confess that I was not tortured by any feelings of guilt. The killing was in self-defense, but still, the mind is a strange machine and not easily capable of distinguishing reality. The brain understands the grey areas of morality and motivation. The mind only understands the act in its most basic form…a murder. I can't complain. I ate well. I slept well enough. Me and Alberich moved in together in a small room above the bar. All was well, that is until 1933, when the world flipped upside down once again.

## XII My Brother Hans

The events of that year are much too numerous to mention. Three events of that year stand out in my mind. The first is the horrific book burning on May 10, 1933 in the Operlatz (Berlin public square), within view of the Grand Opera House and Germanys oldest Catholic cathedral. I stood among a crowd of thousands watching brown shirted Nazi stormtroopers, angry young students, and overenthusiastic students from the University throwing copies of the world's greatest literary works into the fire. Books of Brecht, Einstein, Freud, Mann, and

Hirschfield turned to smoke and ash in a symbolic display of hatred, intolerance, and ignorance. Across Germany, in thirty-four University towns, this same macabre ceremony of fire was taking place. I looked at the faces of the spectators. I watched the shadow of the twenty-foot-high flames dance across the expressions of the witnesses to this insanity. Most held expressions of delight, whether felt or faked. Others, like myself, with stoic expression of granite, and just subtle hints of sadness in the eyes.

I could only mutter to myself, "we are witnessing a madman's dream become reality,"

I dared not speak these words too loudly. Germany, even before 1933, was a world of diminishing privacy. The Nazi's were well prepared for the eventuality of absolute power long before Hitler came to power in 1933. Apart from the strong-arm section of the Nazi party, the brown shirts, teachers and students, bosses and workers, spouses and children, kept eyes and ears opened for any speech that rebelled against Nazi belief. This also included any sympathy for Jews, communists, and homosexuals. The seeds of the holocaust were planted long before the Nazi rise to power. German, and much of European history, is stained with intolerance towards the Jews. In 1933, Hitler did nothing more than water those seeds with gifted oratory and superb organization.

The second event worthy of mention was the trashing of the Institute of Sexology headed by Magnus Hirschfield. Formed in 1919, the institute delved deep into the waters of human sexuality. Doctor Hirschfield was a pioneer in the dangerous business of early gay rights. In a world, still held under the superstitious sway of Christian morality, Dr. Hirschfield applied

science and humanity to the issue of human rights for all. The first sex change operation was performed there, although this was not a sex “change” at all. Dr, Hirschfield recognized the reality of one living a tortured existence in the wrong body. It was no surprise that he would become a target after the Nazi seizure of power. The institute was ransacked. All research writings and books were hauled away to the flaming pile of destroyed history on the night of May the tenth.

The third episode of mention happened in 1934 and is of a personal one. After ten years my past caught me, as it always does despite our best efforts to forget the past. I was working a double at the El Dorado. The Nazis just came to power and change was as a thick as a persistent fog throughout Germany, particularly Berlin. Hitler purged the top leadership of his brown-shirted SA. The top SA commander, Ernst Rohm, along with dozens of officers, were arrested under the pretense of immoral acts (homosexual acts). It was common knowledge that the SA was a haven for in the closet homosexuals Many of us knew that the excuse of homosexuality for the mass arrests and subsequent executions was false. Hitler and his top leadership cared little about homosexuality. The Fuhrer himself was heard to say, when questioned about his SA leaders open homosexuality, that he did not care. He was not running a charm school for women. He was forming an organization of tough male veterans, and sex between males in an all-male organization is to be expected, if not outright encouraged. However, we also had the insight to recognize this excuse as a dangerous sign of things to come for gay men, and my suspicious were soon confirmed.

"There he is, my murdering little homo brother," came a voice behind me as I absently washed glasses with my back to the bar. A shiver ran down my spine, not readily recognizing the voice.

My time is up, I thought, as I found the courage to turn around and, as I imagined, faced the barrel of a pistol.

"Hans is that really you," I stated as I stared into the almost familiar face of my brother. In ten years, he aged twenty. The once smooth pale skin was replaced in spots with deep lines of worry, and a darkish tint of dirt from the mean streets of the post war world.

He smiled, half a smile, and stated, "Hello little brother. I missed you, but there is not much time. We need to talk in private."

Alberich would not be in town for several more days. He went to visit his parents in Munich. I almost laughed at the thought of him taking a girl, Anita Hoss, a waitress from the club, and good friend. His parents did not have a clue that he was involved with me romantically. As with most workers and patrons of gay bars across the nation, discretion is as second nature as an appendix.

"We can go up to my room and talk big brother," I said, and led him to my room.

"You are doing well enough for yourself Karl. I am happy for you."

"You are not angry with me Hans?" I asked with genuine disbelief. I was expecting a lecture at the very least, and a thrashing at the most. I dared not even consider that he would turn me in to the police, or the SA. He was my brother, and we still at least had a certain amount of respect for each other, if not love.

"No Karl. Look at the world outside. I am a Captain in the SA, soon to be given a post as Major in the SS guard.

The SS would eventual replace the unruly SA throughout Germany. The SS was an elite organization giving unconditional loyalty to Hitler and the Nazi party. They would run the police, run the concentration camps, and later distinguish themselves with bravery in war.

"I do see Hans. I see an escalation in beatings of Jews, closings of free clubs like this one, and burning of great works of literature." I restrained myself from saying more. I did not want to provoke him. This was my brother standing before me, but a part of him did not belong to the brother of my memories. He had a coldness in his eyes. An intelligence placed on the tight leash of hatred.

He smiled and replied, "You always were the one with the soft heart. That's ok my brother. I came hear not to argue, but to protect you. You are still a suspect in the disappearance of Peter Luther. Not too mention, which I personally find funny, you shattered a young girl's heart when she found out you only like men."

He laughed and did something that gave me an initial startle. He wrapped his arms around me and hugged me tight. My shock turned to sadness when I felt his embrace. This felt like a farewell hug. The kind of farewell hug I planned on giving Ada, if it wasn't for later unforeseen events. He knew in advance that I would refuse his following offer.

"Karl, I have arranged for you to join the ranks of the SA. You will have to renounce your current relationship, and any further contact with a man done in the privacy of the party."

Before I could ask, he knew of my current relationship, he interrupted, "Karl, take me up on my offer. There is going to many arrests coming over the next several months, possibly years. I fear that you will not weather the coming storm."

But I stated, my response is predictable.

"No, my brother, you know I cannot do this."

Without another word, and with tears in both of our eyes, he walked out my door forever. I would never see him again. It was not until later that I would discover that my brother Hans was killed during the 1940 invasion of France. I am relieved that he did not have the opportunity to take part in the most horrifying mass murder of the twentieth century.

## XIII Arrest

Once again, the years go by and things do change like the seasons. It was two years since the last time I saw my brother Hans. Alberich never did come home. I received word just two

days after that 1934 meeting with Hans, that Alberich's body was found next to his wrecked car just a few miles from his parents' home. Normally, in a world with an erased history, the only stories highlighted in the Nazi controlled press were ones of Hitler's grand revival of the Germany economy, military, and revival of German art. However, Alberichs death made front page headlines. According to reports, he was on the Nazi watchlist of subversive peoples since 1933. Again, according to reports, he was the secretive leader of a local communist terrorist organization, responsible for various acts of violence against Nazi party officials. This I knew to be a lie. He was an activist since the early 1920's, but an activist for gay rights. He also happened to be Jewish and an outspoken opponent of escalating anti-Jewish acts across Germany. There is no proof, but I know he was assassinated, as well as hundreds of others who have made the list of "enemies of the state."

I stayed on at the El Dorado until its official closing in 1936. The club stayed open illegally after Hitler came to power, but the doors were officially closed in 1933. I continued to live above the empty bar until 1936, the year of my arrest. After losing Alberich I was determined to live the lonely yet peaceful life of the hermit. The world under the swastika was not one that allowed an individual personal freedom to be themselves. My brother was right when he said that he arrived to save me. I was naïve enough to believe that no matter how dictatorial a regime in power, individuality could never be eradicated. I always assumed that not even the Nazi state could invade the privacy of the bedroom, of the mind. I was wrong. Everywhere you would go, someone was listening and watching someone. Spies permeated

every fabric of society. A son informed on his Mother's words of mercy for the persecution of the Jew. A student informed on a teacher whom mentioned Einstein as brilliant scientist, and not as a miscreant Jew. In my case, a nosy old hag from a shabby first floor flat mentioned to the authorities that I was spotted coming out the back-alley door of the vacant El Dorado. My questioning was anything but brief. In my usual naivete, I was resigned to be charged with trespass, given a fine, and told to vacate the premises, but this is not the case. I spoke to an SS detective, Albert Brecht.

Inspector Richter: "So why were you living atop the El Dorado/"

Me: "I worked there three years ago as a bartender."

Inspector: "Do you not know that the El Dorado was closed by the state?"

Me: "Yes sir. I had nowhere else to go."

Inspector: "Do you know why this place was closed?"

Me: "Yes sir. Too many homosexuals frequented the place."

Inspector: "Are you a homosexual?"

Me: "You should know inspector."

Inspector: "And why is that?"

Me: “I used to serve you drinks every Saturday night.”

Can you believe I said that? I honestly was that stupid. I was honest, which makes me stupid. The fact I served this man drinks every weekend for a year was true. I honestly believed that he would protect me, like we all belonged to some gay fellowship, but this is not the case. Truth of the matter is that if he could have killed me right there in his office, he would have. If he was sure that I did not have some little black book of names hidden somewhere in Berlin, he would have shot me dead either there or in some covert fashion. Maybe another traffic accident like Alberichs. So, he did the next best thing. He threw me in a cell in the basement of the Berlin police station and left me in the hands of the prison system. Although I was already disturbed by the sudden change of events, I was particularly disturbed by what he said as I was escorted from his smoke-filled office.

He said, “We have a place for you in the basement, but don’t get too comfortable. You will soon live out your life in the open air.”

At the time, I had no idea what he meant by such strange words. In 1938, I would feel the full effect of this man’s strange words.

## XIII Uncertaintity

My two years boarding at the Berlin police station (city hall) was one of, only what I can describe as, enlightening. I learned for the first time in my life the natural defense mechanism of indifference, as I believe, built into every thinking being. I started from day one for about six

months in fear. Each morning I would wait for my breakfast, consisting of a bowl of cold potage, to be slipped carelessly from underneath my cell door. My cell is nothing more than a six-foot square concrete box with walls ten feet high, with a splintered nightstand next to my steel framed cot topped by a thin dirty mattress. I can feel the springs jab sharply into my ribs if I attempt to continue with my habit of sleeping on my sides. The door is made of at least seven inches of steal with two small openings, normally closed with a hinged iron door. The one on the top is just big enough for a guard to peer inside or, on some occasions, hurl insults into the lightless confines of my cell. The bottom hinged door is just big enough to have two daily meals flung across the cold concrete floor.

So, my first six months was not in anger over loss of such subjective concepts as personal freedom. I was in fear of an assassin faking my suicide. Even if I would have had a rope or, able to fashion one out of my torn and stained striped prison clothes, there would be nowhere to fasten the rope. I suppose I could have sharpened a bed spring to cut my wrist, and this thought did not fail to grasp my imagination but hanging was the most common form of "suicide" in the prison system. But as stated before, the possibility of hanging oneself was next to impossible. The fact is, I called out a Berlin police detective for associating with my gay male friends at an outlawed gay nightclub. Fear of death was not irrational in such circumstances.

As the six months stretched to twelve, I rationalized that something, or someone, was preventing my untimely murder. The problem with life in a windowless concrete box, is the amount of time a person must think. I thought of so many scenarios of why I was kept alive.

Most are too irrational and embarrassing to mention. The truth was much simpler than I could have ever imagined.

On the one-year anniversary of my arrest, I received a visit from my brother Hans.

"Look at you Karl, he stated, with eyes lowered to the floor in shame and disappointment. "You were supposed to be the smart one. The sensitive one. I guess you are proof of what of the price of sensitivity in this new world."

I felt weak from lack of nutrition. Over the course of the last two months of the year, meals were reduced to one instead of two. The SA guards were replaced by SS men in black uniforms. They never opened the latch to hurl insults at the prisoners. You miss human contact even if that contact is degrading.

I began, "Hans, my only crime was loitering in a vacant building. For this I have been reduced to hat you see."

"No Karl, this was not your only crime. You are an open homosexual, and worse, you accused my friend, inspector Richter, of the same subversive activities."

It was at that time all my questions were answered. I am alive only because my brother was now an SS Major, with some very high political contacts. Hope swelled inside me like a flowing river in a torrential downpour.

As if reading my mind, he continued, “No Karl, I cannot get you out of this, but merely ensure that you do not meet with a tragic accident, or suicide.”

“Hans, please help me.”

For the first time I watched as his hard exterior cracked under the strain of sympathy. Not only sympathy for me, but I surmised, for many events witnessed since the end of the war. I knew deep down that he was not a Jew hater. He was raised by the same loving Mother and Father as me. I watched in hopeful anticipation for the tears of humanity to fall, but this was not to be. His expression quickly turned to granite once more and he said, “you will face reeducation in a new camp system devised by our leader, Heinrich Himmler.”

“Good bye Karl. I will wait for you to become well and join me in the world once more,”

Without having a chance to speak, my brother was gone again from my life, and my depression set in.

Depression was the next stage in my enlightenment. I no longer felt the fear of imminent death, but I mourned the loss of that subjective concept of freedom. Even worse than this, I kept hearing my brother’s words echo through my mind like sound traveling in a deep dark cavern. The words, “when you become well.” I am not sick. Since coming to this city, I have met hundreds, maybe thousands, like me. Is it so sick to fall in love with another man? Is it so sick that I should be left to rot in six by six mausoleum in the middle of the most civilized cities in the world? And so, this depression lasted for a few months, and was finally replaced with the gift of

indifference. I no longer cared if I lived or died. I no longer cared if I was sick or well. If I could stand the deep stabbing pains of hunger in my stomach, starvation could be my salvation, but I am too much a coward to die that way. The will to live is the strongest instinct known to animal, and my next trial would prove this theory.

## XIV The Death Camp

I arrived at Mauthausen concentration camp late in the year nineteen thirty-eight. The camp, as I later discovered was based on the set up of most Nazi camps, a large rectangle, surrounded by layers of fencing and barbed wire, containing hastily built wooden barracks for hapless victims of Hitler's regime. During the time at the Berlin prison, I overheard a few conversations between SS guards. Statements such as, "the Jews really don't know what's coming," and, "the camps are being hastily built now," were common themes followed by laughter. I did not place any meaning on these fragmented conversations, until now. My sleeping assignment was in the far Eastern corner of the camp, barracks number five. Here, in barracks five, only prisoners wearing the pink triangle lived…and died. The Nazis had a color classification based on the category of prisoner in the camp. Convicted criminals wore a green triangle on their stripped prisoner uniform. Red triangles reserved for political prisoners, social democrats, communists, and trade unionists. The purple triangle belonged to the Jehovah witness. Black triangles were given primarily to those deemed social misfits (work shy, mentally ill, alcoholics, drug addicts, and prostitutes). Finally, the star of David given to the Jews. Homosexuals wear the pink triangle and always separated from the other prisoners. The idea was

that homosexuality could be cured like a sexually transmitted disease. This is how we were looked upon during that period of history…as dirty and diseased. Extermination of gay men was not in the official agenda of the Nazi regime. I believe this is because there were so many closeted homosexuals within the Nazi party. It is rumored that top Nazi leaders enjoyed a life of secretive same sex relationships. But this is the face of lunacy. A continuous contradiction until the truth is too buried deep to ever see the light of day. In either case, we enjoyed our separation. Love continues even in the face of horror. In fact, it is horror that can act as a motivator for love. Personally, my betrayal of Roland, the death of Albereich, and two years of near starvation prevented me from sexual arousal, let alone love. I kept to myself listening to the groans of love making and starvation, and meditated deeply on survival, because survive I was determined to do.

Survival is an understatement in the concentration camp, especially Mauthausen. The first six months consisted of not more than hard twelve-hour days building barracks, and oddly at the time, converting an old railroad car into a sealed room. However, by 1939, the camp began to fill to the brim. Sardining prisoners into wooden rectangular barracks have a limit. Prisoners in the main camp began to die of typhus and starvation. Each day on our way to the stone quarry, I would pass dozens of frozen emaciated bodies. The ghastly figures looked like human skeletons with a thin layer of rice paper covering disintegrated muscle. Our bodies began eating themselves as our rations dwindled to a bowl of rotten potatoes and weevil infested bread. My first time I saw a bug crawling through the pours of my bread I must admit, I gaged and vomited.

This was a mistake I never allowed to happen again. That precious vomit spilled onto the dirt was a days' worth of energy wasted. I learned to form an understanding between me and the weevil. I would let him eat as much of the bread as he could, enjoying the contentment of a fat satisfied gut, then I would quickly end his life and feast on his protein rich body. Not a bad trade off I must say. I heard rumors of several barracks throwing out the dead with bite marks taken out of the fleshier parts of the body, but I shudder to think of the act. Our barracks was isolated from the others and for this I was grateful.

The stone quarry, in which most of us labored was a true test of survival, at least at first glance. The truth is that the stairs of death was a gamble…a roll of the dice. Most died within six weeks of working in the granite quarry. At the bottom of the stairs, prisoners labored with pick axe and shovel breaking large blocks of stone. Waiting nearby were the unlucky ones. This prisoner carried one hundred-pound blocks of granite on their back up one hundred and eighty-six uneven stairs carved into the face of the mountain. Twelve hours of walking up and down the stairs with only bug infested bread and rotten potatoes to see him through. As I said, most collapsed within a few weeks, but always another newly arrived prisoner to take his place. Many from my barracks died on the stairs. I worked the bottom of the pit for most of the four years I lived at the camp. Oh, yes, I survived four years, but I do not know how. My body appeared no stronger than another. Malnourishment, occasional beatings, and exposure to disease, cold, and back breaking labor broke my body but not my spirit. My indifference carried over from the Berlin prison to the camp. Many of these men were torn from society and brought directly to the

camp. I attribute my two years of incarceration as mental preparation for the harsh realities of the Nazi camp system.

But I watched others not so fortunate to escape the attention of the sadistic guards.

“Hey Heinrich, lets play a little bit of push or die.”

“Sounds wonderful, we need to start making room for more prisoners.”

“Many of these are too sickly to work usefully much longer. I say one hundred need to die today.”

“Many of our resident fairies do not seem to be reformed.”

“Then we will have to include them in our game.”

And so, the game continued throughout that day, which included dozens of men from the pink triangle barracks. All received horrible treatment, but there seemed to be an especial loathing for the gay men of the camp, not only from guards, but from other prisoners. As if our lives were of less value than others. But the game continued, and it went something like this.

A prisoner would carry his one-hundred-pound load to the top of the stairs. Exhausted and ready to collapse he would be forced to the edge of the cliff looking down on the busy prisoners below breaking rock. Another prisoner would be given the choice to either

push the man off the ledge to his death or be shot. This was a macabre experiment in human nature. Kill or be killed. Most chose to kill.

Another past time was less dramatic and certainly of absolute no philosophical value. An exhausted prisoner would kindly be given the offer to sit down and rest at the top of the stairs. If he did, he was shot in the back of the head. I would often look to the top of the stairs and watch as a fine red mist of blood dissipated into the breeze immediately after the pop of the guard's pistol. And on and on, prisoners would die only for a new one to take his place. By nineteen forty-two, a more efficient means of killing was born.

## XV My End

In the Spring of 1942, several inmates from my barracks were informed that our work in the quarry was suspended for a few weeks. This pleasant surprise did not meet with any protest from tired minds. Normally, red flags would spring up in a person's mind if told that a few weeks of rest was ordered by sadists bent on killing people through hard labor, but not in this situation. The only words I heard were "a few weeks of rest." This did not make the four of us particularly popular among the other inmates. It would be noble of me to describe feelings of guilt tearing at my soul, but I cannot feel an emotion that has long since ceased to have any effect. Rest in the camp meant life, or at least a chance to live another day. Still, somewhere lurking just beneath the surface was a spark of curiosity. A curiosity that would flash across the mind and die like a shooting star, each

time my head touched the lice infested straw that made up my bedding. But within one week that curiosity was satisfied with a horrifying reality.

“Prisoner 125769 have a seat,” stated Franz Ziereis, the camp commandant. He was not a very imposing man, with dark hair, dark eyes, and an average round face. It was his uniform of the SS that always intimidated the inmate. A black uniform, silver polished buttons, and the skull and crossbones insignia of the deaths head unit. These were the men who ran the daily operations of the camp. Bureaucrats as sadistic and dangerous as the worst criminal housed within the camp. It was his direction that accounted for the daily murders committed by equally brutal guards. I can almost forgive the guards. Most were peasant farmers from the surrounding area, out of work, no education, and happy to do anything for money to survive. The SS so called elite are another story. These men have degrees, and in some cases, doctorate degrees. They understand the subtleties of soft-spoken rhetoric, and the powerful motivation of such speech. Words kill just as frequently as bullets or, in this case, poison gas.

“Karl is your name I believe, but that doesn’t matter. I am giving you the opportunity to live out your sentence. You, and the other three were handpicked because of your toughness. Not an easy feat to survive my camp for four years.”

I dared not reply. This was an opportunity that would not slip by. I have been reduced to the survive at all cost mentality of the uneducated guards.

"You will report to SS Sergeant, Gunther Fry tomorrow, and every morning for the next five days. The camp at Dachau is overflowing with the old, the sick, and woman and children. We are to take some of the pressure off that camp. You will be working at the rail car just a few miles West of the camp entrance, Dismissed!"

That night I could not sleep. The other three men did not seem to suspect what duties lie ahead. I wondered if they believed in a reduced sentence in return for the up and coming work. Did they not know that by 1942, homosexuals were no longer targeted for rehabilitation through work? Rumors abounded of mass arrests of not only Jews and political opponents, but also of homosexuals, and concentration camps were not places designed to release people back into society. The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union just a year prior, opened the floodgates of true Nazi intentions. Mass shootings, hangings, and gassings of Jews, Gypsies, and those considered anti-social are not easily covered up, not even by the thorough Nazi propaganda machine of Dr. Joseph Goebbels. I was afraid that my days were numbered. Although sad to see your own death like looking into the seer's crystal ball, some events completely break a person and kill their will to survive long before facing the firing squad.

## XV Dirty Work

That day in March, was crisp despite the unusual brightness of the morning rising sun. I stood outside the back end of the rail car with my fellow prisoners and watched in silence as the sunlight caused the drops of dew to sparkle, like tiny shards of diamonds.

My mind was blank because I did not want to look at the people being herded off a rail car that pulled up slowly next to the sealed chamber. You see, I was part of the construction crew that built this sealed compartment. The wooden car was first meticulously measured at twenty feet in length and seven feet in width. We laid bricks from floor to ceiling, and then the outer walls were cemented two inches thick. My concern was that the wooden floor of the car would not withstand the weight. After bringing these concerns to the Nazi SS engineer of the project, support beams were installed under the wooden floor to support the weight. I later received my reward for such marvelous insight…a brutal beating. A six-inch steel door was attached to both front and back of the car, and a peephole installed on the front one only. I remember thinking, "why a peephole, how odd."

As the new arrivals were pushed into the car, I heard the SS guard count one hundred and twenty. I dared not look at the faces. One hundred and twenty people in such a small space. I pictured a large tin sardine can being slowly peeled back to reveal the contents. One hundred and twenty naked people stacked on top of the other soaking in their own excrement, urine, and blood, eyes bulging and looking straight at me…" why were part of this Karl. Why?" I felt my stomach cramp as I shacked my head to dispel this terrifying image. Just as I did so, a large army truck pulled up to the right side of the car. A young SS man ran from the passenger side and connect a hose that ran from the exhaust to a

pipe. That was all, except for fifteen minutes of screaming, clawing, and crying to God for mercy.

Our job was simple. We opened the back door pulled the feces stained corpses from the car and loaded them on to an open truck. From there I did not know where the bodies had gone. My other job was to disinfect the car with bleach and water. I would scrub as fast as I could the blood and urine from the concrete walls. This continued for five days. I counted at least three thousand dead during that time. I would learn later that at least ten thousand were gassed at the camp before its liberation in May 1945.

## XVI Indifference

On the fifth day the routine changed. After heaving the dead bodies on to the truck, I would go with the grim-faced driver to the newly built crematorium. We drove in silence to the red brick building billowing smoke day and night and dropping human ash into sections of the camp. It was unavoidable once the killings began to eat human ash or have your clothes layered with the dirty grey powder. The Nazi regime was built on death and allowed to exist, first by a desperate German populace, and then by impotent leaders of the world. Hitler could occupy the Rhine, Annex Austria, take Czechoslovakia. This is the price we pay for supporting madness. We eat and wear the ash of our dead.

That day, as I pulled the bodies from the truck to place on the steel rollers of the conveyer. I saw my neighbor, Mr. Vogel. I had a flashback to that Autumn day in 1914,

watching the soldiers marching off to the first world war. I remembered looking across the street and seeing Mr. Vogel wave happily at the green troops away from home for the first time. He looked so happy then. Here he is now, a pink triangle prisoner, stuffed into a sardine can, and now to be turned to ash. I thought of Roland, and for the first time in years, wanted to cry. But there was no time for crying. My time was at an end. Just one more load of prisoners and then it will be our turn. I tried to make the others see the logic of our execution the previous night.

"You know men, we are not going to have our sentences reduced. They are going to kill us," I stated as we lay on our bunks.

Most remained silent except for Abraham. I only know him as Abraham. A Jewish name but apparently not a Jew, otherwise he would not be in our barracks. Worse than being a homosexual was being a Jew.

Abraham protested, "what do you know. How can you be so certain?"

"You know how I came to be here. I knew about a police inspector who frequented the El Dorado club. For that reason, I never was released from custody."

"You're here because you are like us. Gay, happy, and beautiful."

This received a good laugh from the other crew. I must admit I laughed too.

"Don't you see. They cannot leave witnesses. Do you think the world knows about the camps and the mass murder? We are witnesses, and we are going to be silenced. Regardless, we would have been killed anyway. Gay men are no longer considered an inconvenient truth. Gay men are targeted for extermination."

The rest of the night was quiet, I felt remorse for expressing my logical conclusion. Maybe it is better not to know until the very moment you receive a bullet to the head.

## XVII A Last Kiss

It is funny how perception of time is not absolute. My time as a boy in Frankfurt, playing silly games with the boys, watching a world prepare for a bloody war in the trenches, falling in love, and coming of age was one of rapid travel without a thought of the past or present, only possibilities of the future. My time of that first kiss with Roland was one of slow time. The world of my peripheral vision moved at its normal pace but bringing myself to Roland's lips was the blissful slow motion of anticipation. An entire lifetime of living in his strong soft embrace flashed before my eyes as we closed a mere six-inch distance between us. Life in the camp fluctuated between both extremes of rapidity and sluggishness, with days that dragged on forever and nights of exhaustion that seemed to move at the blink of an eye. The morning of our final shipment of sick prisoners ready to march sheepishly to their death was one of obliteration of time. Past, present, and

future ceased to exist as if erased by some inexplicable cosmic hand. I found this feeling of absence to be a merciful gift, filling my mind with a type of spirituality I never felt before. The inevitability of one's death has this effect on an individual. In the end we are nothing but recyclable material. We become food for the worms, or ash in the sky, and all we have done really means nothing. Walking for the last time to the rail car of death, all these thoughts passed through my mind. I began to feel a strange type of power cover me. I felt as a child playing in the cold January air with the anticipation of returning home by sunset to slowly sink into a prepared warm bath. I did not know where home was, but I was content with going.

If this was going to be my last day on earth, I was determined to look at the faces of the final transport of the fifty-two inmates marked for death. I asked Abraham if we could switch jobs for the day. He was reluctant because his job was much easier than the rest. He merely greeted the prisoners and made sure that they undressed before entering the gas chamber. He was instructed to inform the new arrivals that they had nothing to fear. His speech went something like this, "welcome to Mauthausen camp. A hot meal, clean clothes, and a work assignment awaits you inside the camp. Today you will be disinfected for lice. We pride ourselves on living in the cleanest camp in the Reich."

That was his speech, and he had to say this with a straight face with each batch. I was glad not to have been assigned this ghastly duty. But my guilt was not entirely absolved. By pulling out the bodies and disinfecting the room of all evidence of mass murder, I felt a part of the process, and for just one last time, I wanted to see the faces of our victims.

I finally persuaded him to change places for the day. I had to suppress a laugh as I promised to give him my daily ration of food for the next two days. I was not concerned about the consequences of such an arrangement, I was certain we would not see the next morning.

I scanned the faces of the prisoners standing in line. All had the indifferent expression of animals in a slaughterhouse once acceptance of the situation set in. So, I walked slowly up the line giving the prepared speech, when…

"Roland. Roland, it's you!"

I did not know what else to say. There was no time. I ran to him and wrapped my arms around his body. I felt nothing bone as I gently pressed his body next to mine. I looked at his face, no longer the beautiful Greek stature chiseled of the man I once knew. His face was sunken, and his eyes protruded from their sockets. He stared at me as if seeing a hallucination brought about by the typhus that was swarming through his body. But his lips gave the recognition I

so craved. He softly said, “Karl my love.” I kissed him deeper than I could ever kiss another man. “I’m sorry Roland. I betrayed you. I love you so much.”

I only remember one last thing he said to me before the SS guard on duty forced us apart with a blow to the back of my head. He said, “Just kiss me one last time.”

## XVIII A Life Well Spent

I have very left to say. We weren’t killed that day, but at least I was spared from removing Roland’s body from the rail car. As I laid on the ground, with consciousness fading, I watched Roland walk into the chamber, occasionally looking back with an expression of emotion very rare to see in this life. The expression of true love.

My only explanation for my survival is that killing the brother of a war hero was much more dishonorable than killing millions of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals. I care nothing about the reasons for my survival. I came to America, and Pennsylvania, with thousands of other Germans fleeing the tattered post war European world. The camps were either destroyed by retreating Nazis or liberated by Russian and American troops. It would take years for the world to acknowledge the extent of the Nazi holocaust against the Jews. It may take the decades more for the world to acknowledge the Nazi holocaust against

homosexuals, but let this lesson be learned well…when people turn away from the systematic murder of an individual group's freedom today, their own freedom will face extermination tomorrow.

End

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