

One

Berlin

1st November, 1926

The little man was under no illusion, this was not going to be a walk in the park. Berlin wasn't Munich. Munich had been a bubbling cauldron of political extremists since the end of the war. Berlin was a hotbed of Communists. Turning the Reds to nationalism was going to take some considered planning. Berlin was the Red Capital of Europe this side of Moscow. The daunting prospect sent shivers down his spine. It was a big responsibility and a demonstration of the trust to get the job done that the Führer had placed in him. Failure was not an option. If he failed here, he would never be given a second chance.

Carrot and stick, he told himself. As his train pulled under the great glass arches of the Anhalter. He was filled with both trepidation and excitement. He knew that if the Party was going to survive and fully enter the national political arena from the slippery fringes of the political flux, in any meaningful way, Berlin needed to become Brown.

Not only would they have to conquer Berlin and its Red heart; they would have to woo the bourgeoisie with kid gloves and a lot of sweet talk. It might take a few years, but he was sure he could do it and the Führer will enter Berlin with garlands of flowers instead of walls of lead. The great capital, one of the greatest capitals of the world was a cherry he intended to ripen through means of revolution, negotiation and carefully formulated propaganda. The Jewish backed Bolsheviks were the true enemy. Not big business and industry, they, he recognised, had to be made their allies and supporters. Without them, the Party will only have limited appeal. They didn't need a dozen seats in the Reichstag, they

needed hundreds of seats, they needed to dominate national politics, not fractious regional protest votes, but grass roots loyalty. The Party needed to be the guiding light of the entire nation and nothing less would do. To make the dream a reality, they needed money, they needed the money and support of the very establishment they despised.

He stepped off the train into a drift of steam from the locomotive, infused with the bright winter sunshine falling through the great glass and iron roof.

A mild looking man wearing a grey suit approached him. '*Herr Doktor Goebbels?*'

Joseph turned to the speaker. The man was smiling pleasantly at him.

'Hans Steiger.' He proffered his hand. 'Welcome to Berlin, *Herr Doktor.*'

Goebbels looked down at the proffered hand as if it were a squid's tentacle. Finally, he shook Steiger's hand. 'Good Morning, Herr Steiger.'

'I have a taxi waiting, *Herr Doktor.*' He reached for Goebbels's suitcase and lifted it.

'I wasn't expecting to be met.'

'Oh? I couldn't allow that, Herr Doktor. No, no...'
He gestured. 'Please, it's this way, *Herr Doktor.*'

'Well. Here we are, my boy,' Papa Kaufmann said as they alighted the taxicab.

Kurt felt like he had a nest of bees in his belly, flying and buzzing around inside him as the anxiety of saying goodbye to the people he loved crept up on him. He always felt like this when he was going back to gymnasium. He had only been back four days, for Aunt Hesta's funeral. It had been very sudden and unexpected. Aunt Hesta was only 43 after all. St. Hedwig's granted him leave to attend the funeral.

Dagma had walked to the bahnhof from the mietskaserne with baby Peter in his perambulator. She hugged her little brother, though not so little any more. Just 15 and he was already taller than she

was. Oh, and so handsome too, if she did think so herself.

‘There’s really no need for all of this,’ he said. ‘I can see my own way from here. You know how I hate goodbyes.’ He looked at his sister. Dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, still grieving for Aunt Hesta. Now it was just Kurt, Hesta and the baby and there the bloodline ended.

Kurt felt like a little kid who couldn’t look after himself and he couldn’t wait to get away from them and onto the train. He was 15 – a man in his own opinion, if not theirs.

‘We’ll just see you inside,’ Papa Kaufmann said. Mama Kaufmann smiled maternally at him; her eyes watery with tears.

Why do these *Auf Wiedersehens* always feel like a departure to the afterlife? Kurt asked himself. Dagma had always been the emotional and melodramatic type. The Kaufmanns were far more reserved than to give way to public displays of emotion. The old Major was the archetypal Prussian officer. ‘I’ll be home in a few weeks for Christmas,’ he said, trying to soothe his sister.

Mama Kaufmann took Dagma’s hand in hers with remarkable patience. ‘There, there, Dagma. You mustn’t take on so. Kurt will be back before we know it. It’s been such a difficult time for you both with poor Hesta.’

Papa Kaufmann led Kurt away to impart a few wise words of fatherly advice.

Dagma dabbed her eyes and nodded reassured. ‘I know. I know, Fräü Kaufmann. I still can’t believe she’s gone. I just wish mama and papa were still here...’

Mama Kaufmann understood that feeling of loss. ‘You’ve been a mother to the boy, Dagma. And now,’ she said, looking into the perambulator at baby Peter, sound asleep, warm and snug under his blankets, ‘you have to be a mother to this little one. And you’ll be a fine mother, Dagma. You know whatever we can do, we shall. You and Kurt have brought such joy to our lives. You’ll never know.’

Dagma smiled. 'I think that's more Kurt than I, Fräü Kaufmann. He loves you both so very much.'

Had it not been for the Kaufmanns, Kurt would have been put in an orphanage and God knows what would have become of Dagma. They had been the kindest and most generous and selfless people in the entire world, from Dagma's perspective; and they had taken to Kurt from the day they met him as a small boy whose heart was filled with sadness for the loss of his parents. And the Kaufmanns' hearts were equally broken for the loss of their only child, killed in action on the Eastern front in 1915. They had mended one another, and they had welcomed Kurt and Dagma into their lives and cherished them both.

And now here Kurt was, a gymnasium boy, having the finest education at one of the country's finest gymnasiums. The Kaufmanns had made it all possible.

It was busy in the huge expanse of the Anhalter, it was always busy, the broad concourse a bustling hive of pedestrians, commuters and travellers, hurrying purposefully to their destinations. Kurt's heart raced along with them, feeling the pull of movement and purpose. He felt like a wild horse fettered to a tree, wanting to gallop away.

Mama Kaufmann framed Kurt's face in her gentle hands and gave him a kiss on each cheek and tucked thirty marks secretly into his hand so Papa Kaufmann and Dagma didn't see, just as she always did.

'No, Mama Kaufmann. I can't. Really. I have enough. You gave me money after the Summer holiday.'

'You might need new shoes,' she said, adding. 'Our little secret.'

Papa Kaufmann gave him a hug and some more wise words of that he didn't really listen to, when maybe, in later years, he'd wish he had. 'There is a difference between being a young man and a young gentleman, Kurt. You must forever strive to be a gentleman. Especially if you hope to become an officer of the Reichswehr. And you are as fine a young gentleman as ever I've met, my dear boy.'

'Thank you, sir.' It was all Kurt ever wanted, to follow in his father's footsteps and become a soldier, and in Papa Kaufmann's to become an officer and nothing would make the old major prouder; and Kurt would be the first officer in the Eichhorn family, just as he was the first to go to gymnasium.

'You must concentrate on your studies, Kurt. Be fastidious and mindful and conscientious. Now, more than ever, because you're no longer a child, but a young gentleman. Good marks, good conduct and a good character. That's the ticket, my dear boy. That's the key.' He patted Kurt on the shoulder.

Kurt nodded his head and smiled. 'I will make you proud, Papa Kaufmann.'

'*Bda.* I'm already proud of you.' He proffered his hand. Gentlemen always shake hands. He pressed sixty marks into Kurt's palm. 'For your books, you understand. For your learning. Not for cheap schnapps and misadventures with country fräuleins...'

Kurt went red in the face and smiled.

'Oh yes, I was your age once.' He gave Kurt a knowing smile.

'Yes, sir. And I'll write every week as I always do. To you all.' He hugged Dagma and kissed baby Peter, then, without any further dallying, he picked up his suitcase and hurried away, into the bahnhof, before he started crying too, and he felt like crying. It was as if his heart was being squeezed by a big invisible hand. These goodbyes were so difficult and they never got any easier.

As he hurried across the concourse towards the platforms, Kurt ran slap into a short gentleman who was walking, or rather stalking briskly across the concourse, albeit with a limp he was trying his best to hide. A man following behind, carrying a suitcase looked horrified and a was about to give the clumsy boy a piece of his mind.

'Excuse me, sir. I'm very sorry,' Kurt said humbly as he shuffled to one side with his heavy case.

Dr Joseph Goebbels gave the boy a vague smile. 'That's quite alright. No harm done.' He hurried on without further ado.

Boris kept his distance from Dr Goebbels; he was wearing civilian clothes, looking like an office worker, blending into the crowd as he followed the little limping man outside, where he and Steiger got into a waiting taxicab and drove off into Berlin traffic. Boris loped to his own waiting car, where Leutnant Spellmeyer was sat behind the steering wheel. Boris got into the front passenger seat. 'Follow them.'

Spellmeyer pulled out slowly and as he did, Boris spotted a familiar face. Major Kaufmann and his wife coming out of the bahnhof with a younger woman pushing a baby carriage. '*Major Kaufmann. Small world,*' he mumbled as they drove past.

Spellmeyer glanced at him. '*Herr Hauptmann?*'

'Nothing. I just saw someone I knew during the war, that's all.'

The Berlin headquarters of the NSDAP in the basement of Potsdamer Strasse 109, was more like a dungeon. Dark, damp and unkempt. The smell of stale sweat, tobacco and beer seemed to linger like a bierkeller at midnight. It was dark, untidy and there was barely room to swing a mouse, never mind a cat.

'We call it the *opium den,*' Steiger said with a smile.

Goebbels didn't speak, he just looked disdainfully around the room. A couple of desks, a typewriter, a couple of old chairs fit for nothing but the fire. *No, no, this will never do.* He looked at Steiger. 'It's like a toilet down here. Get the place cleaned up and get rid of those beer bottles. This is unsatisfactory. Very unsatisfactory. No. it won't do, Herr Steiger. It won't do at all. This is the face of the National Socialist German Workers Party, not a dosshouse.'

'It's all we can afford, *Herr Doktor.*'

Goebbels turned a dismissive look on him. 'I want the membership list, financial records and details of our donors and fundraising activities. Bring me everything. It seems to me that there's a lot of dead wood around here, Herr Steiger. And dead wood's no good for anyone. Bring everything you have on the local Communist leaders, their meeting places, their homes, their Arian or no-Arian status and the neighbourhoods they dominate.'

'Of course. And what is the intention?'

'The intention, Herr Steiger, is to make an impact that will mark our determination. This is serious politics now. National politics. We are going to let Berlin know that we are the blood enemies of Bolsheviks and Bolshevism. It's time for the people of Berlin to decide whose side they're on. Germany's? Or Russia's? I want to meet all our big donors, and wealthy individuals, industrialists, bankers and the like, who might be swayed to supporting the Party. I want to meet these people too. But first, make this place presentable, and start looking for better premises. Somewhere we can be seen.'

Outside, Boris and Spellmeyer sat in the car, shivering in their overcoats, watching the building long enough to smoke a couple of cigarettes.

'Alright, Leutnant. I've seen enough. Let's go back to the office and do some real work.'

Spellmeyer didn't need telling twice.

Two

The train rocked smoothly like a ship on a calm sea, snaking through the countryside. Kurt closed his eyes for a moment and his head was filled with the CLICKETY-CLACK ... CLICKETY-CLACK ... CLICKETY-CLACK of the train, lurid and monotonously hypnotic. He felt utterlyretched and miserable. *Why did saying goodbye have to be so difficult? Why did Dagma have to make it such a Greek tragedy of it? Why did she have to come to the bahnhof at all?* He said his goodbye last night, and he told her not to come to the bahnhof because of the cold and the baby might catch a chill. *She never listens*, he thought.

He heard the compartment door slide open and he opened his eyes to see who had entered. It was a lean youth about his own age, lugging a heavy suitcase.

The boy looked at Kurt. 'Give us a hand will you. This thing weighs a ton.'

Kurt got up and helped the boy lift his case up onto the rack over the seats.

'*Danke*,' the boy said and then he proffered his hand smartly to Kurt. 'Sascha von Annendorf.'

'Kurt Eichhorn.'

Sascha had a firm handshake, the sign of a good character according to Papa Kaufmann. And his smile was warm, his eyes curiously inquisitive. He looked up at Kurt's suitcase on the rack. 'Would it be rude to ask where you're going?'

'Baden-Baden,' Kurt said.

Sascha looked hopeful. 'Me too. I don't suppose you're going to St. Hedwig's by any chance?'

Kurt nodded his head. 'Yes.'

Sascha beamed. 'How about that? I'm going there too. My first term. I said to my father that it would be best to start next year after Christmas, rather

than in the middle of a term. Are you just starting there too?’

‘Uhm ... no. I’ve been home for a funeral.’

‘Oh God. My apologies.’

Kurt smiled. ‘An aunt. We weren’t particularly close.’

Sascha nodded his head. ‘I was at another school in England before we moved back to Germany,’ he said. ‘It must be fate. That I chose the compartment of a St. Hedwig’s boy. It’s hideous starting a school without knowing anybody.’

‘Why were you in England?’

‘My father’s a diplomat. Attaché for Trade.’

Kurt noticed a bright glimmer in Sascha’s striking green eyes. He was nervous too, that’s why he was talking so much. Kurt could tell from the slight twitch in the corners of his mouth when he smiled. Kurt realised something else too, something in himself, something that had only become fully comprehensible in the past couple of years. That was his uncontrollable attraction to other boys and men. No matter how hard he tried, he could not get the feelings and thoughts out of his mind. They terrified him, and try as he might, he found nothing titillating or stimulating thinking about busty ladies with palpating vaginas.

Never could a woman stir such feelings in his mind and body as now occupied him in that compartment with Sascha von Annendorf. He was hit by a dizzying wave of waking fantasies that possessed him completely, and shamed him utterly. The crucible of life had grown like the pillar of Hercules as he secretly adored his companion.

‘What’s St. Hedwig’s like?’

There was a sense of inevitability about the question. A natural thing for a new boy to ask, and for the briefest moment, Kurt saw something that looked like nervousness flash in Sascha’s eyes.

For the next hour or so, Kurt told him as much as he could about the school. About the faculty, about the rambling old buildings and the other boys. Good and bad. Boys to avoid, boys not to avoid. There were four boys to a dormitory, everyone had to be in

bed by nine except Saturdays, when it was ten o'clock.

Sascha listened attentive to his every word, his unblinking eyes fixed on Kurt, studying him in some deep and meaningful way. Deciding if this boy and he could be friends?

When he finished talking, they looked at one another, their eyes meeting with an intensity that turned Kurt's blood to fire as he looked intently back into those beautiful green eyes, where beyond the cursory curiosity of new acquaintances, there was another, far deeper, more profound curiosity that Kurt seemed identify, but could not express. The look lasted just a moment, but it left a powerful and ineffable impression on them both; Kurt sensed it keenly, an unspoken and intangible reality.

Eventually, Sascha fell asleep, while Kurt's restless mind wrestled with the first true sense of his own sexuality, his eyes lingering on Sascha.

Suddenly, he stood up and opened his case and reached in for his sketchbook and pencil. He opened the pad at a blank page and started to sketch Sascha as he slept. It was a striking likeness, the sleeping youth with his head cocked to the window, his legs stretched out along the seat, a peaceful and contented look in his face. He drew in the lay of his jacket, the creases in his shirt and trousers, the seat and the window. But it was Sascha's face where he captured serenity and the profound beauty that had captivated him from the moment Sascha came into the compartment. He had captured the essence of desire, the sensuous mouth, the straight even nose, the thick eyelashes, the short curly mop of auburn hair.

He drew in the final details and shadows to give the image depth and perspective.

When he looked up from his pad again and Sascha's eyes were wide open and staring intently at him, his lips curled into a cheeky sort of smile. 'So, you're an artist?'

Kurt felt a moment of awkwardness. 'I wouldn't go that far,' he said modestly.

'Did you just draw me?'

'I was bored.'

Sascha beamed and sat up excitedly. 'Can I see?'

Kurt nodded his head and held the pad over to him, his eyes filled with caution.

Sascha was instantly delighted and completely flattered. Kurt had even named it "***Sascha sleeps on the train to Gymnasium. November, 1926,***" and signed it with a stylised "***K.***" 'Oh my God!' he exclaimed. 'It's wonderful!' He looked at Kurt, his eyes were wide and filled with ebullience. 'You're full of surprises, Kurt. This is just stunning. I love it...'

Kurt blushed. 'Then you didn't mind? You were asleep and you looked...'. He stopped himself from saying it. That word "*beautiful.*"

'Mind? God no. I don't mind. My father would love a drawing like this. He's very interested in art.'

'Not that one,' Kurt said. He wanted to keep that one. It was special to him, his first impression, an expression of desire. 'But I'll draw you another. Something more suitable rather than you sleeping.'

Kurt saw his eyes kindle with excitement. 'Would you? I'd love that, Kurt. You don't know how much I'd love that. You can draw me whenever you like. We're going to be very good friends. I already feel as if I've always known you. I think we've got a lot in common. I know that's a bold statement, but I do feel that most strongly.'

Kurt nodded his head. 'So do I.'