

— *August 25th, 1912. Ruheplatz Schoolhouse Field, 1:20 P.M.* —

Most days, the children had enough to do at school to keep themselves occupied, whether it be one of Frau Schlaeger's fun lesson plans or just being with their friends. Today was not most days. The kids sat around the yard during recess moping around out of boredom. Aigis and Frieda sat on the grass while Otto kicked some dirt or rocks. Gisela laid on her back, not caring about getting blades of grass on her clothes, and let her arms and legs sprawl in every direction. Karl-Heinz and Franz-Josef took turns throwing a pebble into a nearby bush and betting how far each throw could get.

Otto kicked another rock before standing up. "Let's play hide and seek."

"No thank you," Gisela immediately shot down, not getting up. "Hide and seek's booooring."

"You think that because you've never played a game of hide and seek with ME." He pointed to himself with his thumb.

"Because you suck at hiding?" Frieda smirked. Otto groaned, stomping his feet.

"I am NOT! I'm the best hider-seeker ever! No one can ever find me!"

"Wouldn't that technically make you the best *hider*?" Aigis retorted matter-of-factly. Otto just pouted, not having an answer. Franz-Josef threw another rock. It bounced off the bush, ricocheted, and hit Karl-Heinz right in the eye. As Karl-Heinz shouted in pain, Gisela sat up.

"Well, if it can keep those idiots from killing themselves, fine." She got to her feet and brushed herself off.

"I knew you'd come around," Otto confidently chuckled. "I know a spot where no one can find me."

"Okay. So hide." Gisela snorted. Otto blinked.

“I’d feel bad if no one could find me, so how about I bring a friend?” He proposed, scanning the group of five friends. When he stopped at Frieda, he noticed her hand was raised. Otto was shocked.

“Frieda wants to know my methods, does she?” Otto laughed as if he had discovered a huge secret.

“I want to know if your ‘secret spot’ is really that impressive.” She tried to present herself coolly. But her voice cracked a bit on her confident tirade.

“That settles it, then. Who here wants to be the seeker?”

Nobody raised their hands. Gisela still was being aloof, Karl-Heinz was too busy nursing his eye, Franz-Josef was busy picking up all the rocks they used to throw in the distance.

“Aigis? Do you want to do it?”

The blonde 12-year-old shrugged. “Sure, why not?”

“Cool!” He shouted to Frieda. “Let’s go!” Aigis closed her eyes as the other kids dispersed. Karl-Heinz and Franz Josef left and ran to find somewhere to hide. Otto latched onto Frieda’s hand and dragged her to his secret spot. His hand was so warm.

“Do you have to hold my hand?!” Frieda bashfully exclaimed, her face going red.

“I have to guide you to my spot!”

“You can do that WITHOUT holding my hand!” She shouted. Otto and Frieda ran to his spot, hand-in-hand, the latter feeling embarrassed yet somewhat giddy.

Frieda and Otto spent what seemed like an eternity jumping over rocks, ducking under fallen tree branches from the summer thunderstorms, and crawling on the dirt. After a few more minutes of running and crawling, Otto finally let go of Frieda and turned around to face her.

“Okay, we’re here. How do you feel?”

“My dress is dirty now.” Frieda complained, trying to wipe off the dirt off her dress and legs.

“Nevermind that,” He brushed off, wrapping an arm around Frieda and making her face where he was looking. With a loud, boisterous gesture, he presented, “Behold!”

All she could see was a giant boulder sitting in a patch of grassless soil. “That’s just a big rock.”

“*Boulder*,” He corrected.

“...Which is just a big rock. What does this have to do with your super-duper-secret hiding spot?”

“Patience, young one.” Otto smiled. He waltzed over to the boulder and put both hands on it. Heaving, he pushed it, rolling it away to reveal a hole in the ground. Frieda gasped. She couldn’t help but be amazed. Otto proudly grinned. He had a great hiding spot, and even better, Frieda liked it.

“Wow.” Frieda breathlessly gasped.

“Amazing, right? We could be down there all day and no one would even have an idea we’re here.”

He jumped into the hole, landing perfectly on his feet. Frieda jumped in after him. She landed a lot more clumsily, and tripped. Otto caught her and gently sat her back down on both feet.

“You’re welcome.” He spat, playfully fishing for a thank you. Frieda rolled her eyes and silently surveyed the tiny hole. Immediately, the first thing she noticed was Otto had decorated the entire hole with army stuff. A map of the German Empire had been nailed to the wall, a

helmet with an Iron Cross had been set next to it, and a Mauser Model 71 propped up on the wall.

“You really like army stuff, don’t you?” Frieda commented, still looking at the decor. Otto walked over to the Mauser and picked it up.

“Course I do,” Otto said. He pulled the trigger, making the gun click. The noise echoed through the hole. He held it up to his eye, then pointed it at the wall. “I want to join the imperial army when I grow up. I can be the best soldier there is!”

Frieda cautiously approached him. “Are you sure this is safe?”

“Oh yeah, this thing isn’t loaded.”

“I meant the secret hiding spot.”

Otto set the Mauser rifle back down. “Unless some bees or an angry falcon swoops down in here, we’re completely safe. And nobody will know we’re here!”

The thought made her smile. Spending an entire day alone with Otto. The two of them could do anything they wanted to, and no one would be the wiser. She felt herself getting hotter and her heartbeat getting faster. Of course, she tried her best to make sure he couldn’t see it.