

— *October 4th, 1914. Ruheplatz Square, 5:55 P.M.* —

Otto did exactly as he was told immediately. He returned to the local tavern and found the exact same Golden Battalion soldier still black-out drunk, passed out on the wooden floor. He quietly and carefully inserted the rolled-up paper in the right breast pocket of his uniform, where the Gibor rune medal hung from. The soldier stayed knocked out throughout the whole exchange, and Otto got away scot free.

Otto wanted to stay home for the rest of the day after that. Just locking himself in his room and staying there until the time came for Aigis and Frieda to confirm everything. But Pauline demanded he go get milk from the general store. The clouds looked nearly black and brought the type of thunder to cause an earthquake to go with it. She wanted him to grab the milk and come back before the rain started pouring. Hands in his pocket, his red hair fluttered in the howling aggressive wind. The town was eerily quiet, not that he noticed. He went over to Marckel, the man who owned the gen store, a man in his 30s who always had a cigar in his mouth. The man told Otto with half of his mouth that the milk had gone bad. And due to the storm, he had to wait until he could go get more. So Otto was sent home. All he had to do was get back to his mother. But his mind was racing at today's events. He'd heard in passing about the Psychokinetics. Very vague things. He assumed they were all just made up. He asked both his mother and father about them whenever Karl-Heinz or Gisela were gossiping about it one random day in class. Both parents told him they didn't exist. He was to focus on his studies, not pay attention to silly rumors. So, he listened. Until now, it was just some rumor he could just forget about.

But what Aigis did made it undeniable. How else would he just float in the air the moment he should've fallen down the stairs and broken his spine. Her arm was outstretched. For

8 years, Otto had been best friends with a psychokinetic. If it was a genetic thing, didn't that make Frieda one too? According to the German Empire, that would've made them domestic traitors, subhumans. Otto thought to himself for a second that if his father was doing all he could to protect Germany against threats, that he should turn them over to the Empire. The more he ran that option through in his mind, it left a terrible stain in his mouth, a tart bitterness. He saw Aigis and Frieda every day. They talked about various things, laughed at each other, Otto would tease Frieda endlessly until her face got as red as a cherry. They felt like people to him. People who laugh, cry, get angry, and above all, have a soul. How could someone so special like that be a subhuman? Either way, he had to apologize tomorrow. Apologize for making them worry. Apologize for stealing that stupid letter. Maybe then they could forget about it all and continue being friends.

Otto dropped his head, watching his feet crunch the dirt paved road of the Ruheplatz roads. The wind that blew his hair into his eyes didn't bother him much. The dark clouds above threatened rain. Otto kept walking, the wind getting more wily. The air began to stink with rainwater. His pace picked up a little bit. He wanted to get home before the rain fell. His thoughts got interrupted when his body collided with something, forcing him to stumble back. He looked up at what he ran into. Sergeant Kollner and the rest of the Golden Battalion Gibor Squad. They all had their Gerwehr rifles strapped to their backs. Otto remembered they were only going to be in town for a few days. Today must've been their final day.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see you there." Otto quickly apologized. The men were looking down at him. They looked like giants, and the wooden bolt-action rifles they were carrying didn't help. Only Sergeant Kollner's eyes were visible, the golden pickelhaube helmets obscured the eyes of

the ten soldiers, making them look like faceless statues. He couldn't get a clear read on what they were thinking.

"Watch where you're walking, young man," The Sergeant commanded. "We're on important business."

"Where are you going?" Otto gulped, trying his best to diffuse the annoyed officer.

"We heard a report from the Rhineland about a potential Psychokinetic sighting. If it is indeed true, my men will swiftly neutralize the situation."

"Good luck with that." The young boy saluted with two fingers. Without eye contact, he put his head back down and tried to briskly walk away from the Battalion. Kollner turned around and saw the boy speed walking away.

"One moment," The Sergeant barked out. Otto stopped immediately and used his heel to turn his whole body back at the man. His face muscles tensed up, trying their hardest to not expose the internal fear in his heart. "You haven't seen any around these parts, have you?" Kollner asked. The question had Otto paralyzed. His body couldn't move. His heart rate slowed. All the sounds of nature stopped. Aegis and Frieda kept floating up to the forefront of his mind.

"Nuh-uh." He shook his head vehemently. Kollner crossed his arms.

"Are you positive?"

"Never met one in my life." He quickly replied. He wanted so desperately to leave, but his legs felt like concrete. They felt too heavy to even move an inch. The sergeant hid both arms behind his back. One hand latched onto the other wrist. He began pacing around the 14-year-old, his nose pointed up at the musty overcast.

"The weather is quite horrendous, wouldn't you say?" He sneered. "What's a young lad like yourself doing out when a downpour is coming."

“I just need to get some groceries for my mom.” His mouth felt as dry as cotton. He looked over and saw his legs visibly trembling, despite trying with every fiber of his being to keep them steady.

“You know, only one type of creature would be out here in clearly treacherous weather. None other than a Psychokinetic. Dare I say, the same one creating this torrential rain?”

“I told you,” Otto insisted, managing to keep still to glare into the intimidating man’s eyes. “I don’t know anything.”

“Just know, young man. Any strange happenstance you see, you come immediately to the empire. We don’t want those monsters rampaging around our territories and wreaking havoc—”

“How do you know?” His voice cut through the thick air. Otto didn’t think to say this. Nor did he want to. But it was like his mouth and vocal muscles acted without his mind giving the command to.

“What was that?” One of the soldiers calmly yet angrily stepped forward, towering over Otto from behind him. Otto didn’t turn around to look at him.

“Psychokinetics are the nicest people alive.”

“How would *you* know, then?” Kollner sneered, getting in the boy’s face.

“Because I was saved by one!”

Silence. The rumbling of the stormclouds growled in the background. The men in the unit flinched. Otto stood like a deer in headlights. Kollner straightened his posture, looking down upon the boy.

“So there *are* Psychokinetics here?”

Otto felt his eyes sting. Tears threatened to flow out from the corners. His breathing had become so erratic, his entire frame became sore. The image of Aigis saving his life replayed in

the back of his mind. He couldn't bear the thought of her being slandered like that and branded as such an ugly abomination. But his emotions made him strike at the wrong person at the wrong time.

Sergeant Kollner lost patience. His face reddened. "What are the names of your psychokinetic friends?"

Otto shook his head again. He could still salvage the situation. If Aigis and Frieda's names got out, a bunch of angry Imperial soldiers would descend upon them like wolves and maul them. He couldn't let that happen.

"I highly recommend not keeping any secrets from us. If you do not confess, there will be severe consequences."

Otto still made no noise. He stood rigidly, hands clenched into fists at his side. His face showed nothing but defiance. One of the men in the squad pulled out his Gewehr 98, cocked it, and aimed it at Otto.

"Maybe he's a Greenblood himself! Lying just to save his own ass!"

The other men followed suit, preparing their rifles. Otto felt his throat go dry. He looked left to right, seeing all these men ready to kill him on the spot. At this point, his heart was in his throat. Kollner threw up a hand, signaling his men to stand down. Kollner kneeled down to Otto. His lips curled into a malevolent smile.

"We will give you one more chance, son. Tell us the name of your friends, and we'll let you go."

The boy's eyes quivered right into Kollner's soul. Kollner knew the answer he was going to get. He sighed and got up, brushing the dirt and dust off the knees of his uniform trousers. He looked up at the Gibor unit. He took his right hand and pointed at the distant forest outside of the

town with a thumb. The men nodded and two of the soldiers grabbed Otto by the arms. The soldiers marched towards the woods, dragging the boy behind them. Otto kicked and screamed.

“Lemme go! Someone help me! Please!” He cried out.

“Quiet, boy.” One of the soldiers grumbled, covering Otto's mouth with a gloved hand. His screams were muffled, but the tearing of his vocal cords from screaming was all too clear and visceral. Air rushed in and out of his nose as he desperately tried to scream through the hand. His eyes were bloodshot. Otto managed to free his mouth to belt out one, wailing word.

“MAMA!”