

— *July 15th, 1925. Weisheitsbach, Hesse, 10:11 A.M.* —

“Are we there yet?” Frieda asked, leaning back in the passenger seat.

“If I tell you yes, will you shut up and stop asking me that question?” Gerhard sighed as he drove with one hand on the wheel.

“We’ve been driving for hours now. Why so far?”

“Dieter is planning to get a law passed allowing German libraries to stock Psychokinetic texts, books, scriptures, stuff like that. He says it’s important people learn about the PK people and religion to get another step closer to acceptance. So we need to look for those books so he can ship them off to major national libraries all over the country.”

“I’m proud of him. He’s come so far as a Reichstag representative.”

Gerhard chuckled lightheartedly. “I remember when he used to break down and cry around every woman he tried to talk to. Now he’s been happily married for five years I think?”

“He really has come a long way.”

“I know. I’m proud to be his friend.” Gerhard was cheesing, although he turned his head so Frieda couldn’t see. They finally pulled up to the town. Gerhard and Frieda gunned for the library, but the first thing they saw was the towering smoke that billowed from the charred library. Another home a couple of buildings down also had the same smoke billowing from there. Some of the ashes from the library blew off in the wind.

“What happened here?” Frieda asked, eyes wide in terror. Gerhard was horrified too, his eyes were glued to the library and the smoking building next door. A couple of people brought out something on a makeshift stretcher, two wooden poles and a white blanket. All that remained of a body was a charred skeleton. Frieda had to turn away and vomit in the street. Gerhard

noticed something red on the ground. He picked it up and took a closer look. It was a red Swastika armband.

“Hitler’s storm troops must’ve done this.” Gerhard growled, clenching his teeth.

“Storm troops?”

“Dieter told me all about them. They use intimidation and violence to get their leader some political sway.”

“But what were they doing here?”

“Hell if I know,” He groaned, standing up. “Either way, I don’t think we’re getting those books.”

Frieda heard something coming from the other burning house, like a small child crying. She went towards it. In front of the house, a child around 8 years old sat on the sidewalk, covered in soot, sobbing so fast and frequently that she was hitching. The poor girl was hysterical.

Frieda came up to her and knelt down.

“Hello? Are you alright?” She asked in a gentle, soothing voice. The girl looked up, pausing her crying. Frieda didn’t expect her eyebrows to be so thick for a child. The girl started sniffing, trying not to cry anymore.

“Was this your home?” Frieda asked, trying to get her to open up.

“Mind your own business, old lady!” The little girl suddenly snapped. Frieda flinched. Gerhard just rolled his eyes.

“I’m only 25—!”

“Still sounds pretty old to me!”

Frieda didn’t know what to expect. She was so young, yet had the sass of a 40-year-old woman. She stood up and backed away. Gerhard found one of the people carrying the stretcher.

“Who’s that girl?” Gerhard asked the man.

“Hilda Ditzer. The librarian was the one taking care of her.”

Gerhard pointed to the distant charred corpse of Etta Schumacher. “I assume that’s her right there?”

The man nodded solemnly. Gerhard felt like he was about to be sick. “She’s an orphan too. Poor girl’s all alone now.”

Gerhard looked over at the girl covered in tears and soot, who was starting to wail again. He thought back to when he lost his own family. In 1915, he and Dieter returned home from university for the winter holiday. He had found that the German Empire had completely raided his home. His parents, his younger sister who just started high school, and his older brother. It was a day before the Festival of Reflection. The moment he walked in that door, his feet dipped in a viscous liquid. There was more blood than wood on the floor. The bodies of his family were scattered about the living area. Left behind, a single message: *Greenbloods are the virus of this world. We are the cure.* It was signed by some faction called the Golden Battalion.

That was why Gerhard wanted to create Magierhain. To provide a home for the Psychokinetics who lost theirs. Dieter and Ingrid kept him company when they started out as campers starting a small settlement. Now the population of the settlement had grown to about 350 Psychokinetics. Magierhain would be perfect for this girl. Gerhard walked over to her with his hands behind his back to hide the trembling. He opened his arms and knelt down, about to hug her.

Suddenly, Hilda shrieked and ran to Frieda, cowering behind her. All he could see was her tiny fingers, eyes and eyebrows as she peered from behind Frieda’s back.

“I’m not scary,” Gerhard told himself. He then turned to Frieda, his confidence wavering a bit. “Am I?”

“Kind of.” Frieda answered honestly.

“How?!” He cried. It was so funny how he cared so much.

“It’s probably the beard, the scars, the giant rifle on your back—”

“I get it, thank you.” He growled, crossing his arms and sulking.. He then looked down at Hilda, who was still clinging onto Frieda, her face buried in the woman’s waist. He got an idea. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a wrapped chocolate. He knelt down in front of her and presented the candy. Hilda stopped shaking so much. She stared at the chocolate, then Gerhard, and back at the chocolate.

“I don’t bite. Promise.” Gerhard assured her. Hilda hesitantly reached out for the chocolate, snatched it from his hand, and took a bite. She was chewing on it with the speed of a squirrel. Gerhard grinned, standing up and patting her head.

“Now can you trust us? Herr Gerhard and I are friendly.” Frieda assured her.

Hilda paused mid-chew, her eyes wandering from Gerhard to the rest of her surroundings. She swallowed her chocolate.

“Okay.”

“You ended trusting us pretty quickly.” Gerhard laughed.

“I don’t know you, but it feels like... I should trust you, even if I don't know why. I can feel it. In my heart and stomach and bones, and everywhere else.”

“Then come back to Magierhain with us. There’s many magic little boys and girls just like you there. We’ll be safe there.”

Hilda looked at her burnt-out home, then back at Gerhard and Frieda. She was hesitant, but she eventually nodded her head.

“You’re pretty good with kids, surprisingly.” Frieda jabbed.

“You aren’t terrible yourself, Mama Frieda.”

Frieda froze. “Excuse me?”

“You were going to take Hilda in yourself, right?”

Frieda chuckled nervously. “No, no. Me? A mama? I’m much too young.”

“Ingrid was your age when she married Dieter. They just had a son not too long ago.”

“Why can’t you do it? You’re the scary man with a heart of gold! Why can’t you be Papa Gerhard?”

Gerhard pounded his chest. “I’m already ‘Papa Gerhard’. I have about 350 children to take care of. Someone has to run Magierhain.”

Frieda opened out a palm and balled the other hand into a fist. “Wanna make it official?”

Frieda and Gerhard played three rounds of rock, paper, scissors. The first round, both drew rock. The second round, both drew paper. In the third round, Frieda decided to go for scissors, but Gerhard predicted this and drew rock. Frieda sighed, accepting her fate. She was now a mother of an 8-year-old girl.