

— *October 12th, 1914. Ruheplatz Schoolhouse, 7:54 A.M.* —

Even though the roads were still warped and flooded from the worst storm in over 100 years, complete with lightning strikes and Karl-Heinz's house washed up by the Weser, the path to the schoolhouse was now safe enough for all the kids to attend school again. Aigis managed to convince Frieda to come back to school with her. She needed socialization. Frieda locked herself in her room for most of the day after the incident, and only came out for a meal or to the bathroom.

Truth be told, there was another reason Aigis wanted to come to school today. In the days when school had yet to reopen, she looked to hang out with one of her classmates. Gisela, Karl-Heinz, Franz-Josef, anybody from the schoolhouse. But for some reason, they would never seem to look at her. When she made eye contact with her comrades, they gave her the look they would a complete stranger. Wherever she called out with her voice, they acted confused and asked if they even heard a noise. All of this would be followed by the teenagers speed walking away from Aigis. Aigis convinced herself it had to be a string of coincidences. The last time the group had met in school, they were normal. They talked, laughed, played with each other, and had fun. She didn't do anything notorious between that time. So what was the deal?

When Aigis and Frieda approached the schoolhouse, they stopped a few meters away. What they saw were the other eight students were all standing outside the schoolhouse, holding either sticks or rocks, and barricading the doors and windows to the building. Aigis looked at Frieda with a questioning glance, expecting at least an educated guess. Frieda shrugged, not understanding what the situation was either. Aigis turned back towards the commotion, and decided to ask.

She stepped forward and questioned, "Um, guys? What's going on here?"

Franz-Josef, who stood at the head of the barricade in front of the doors. None of them said a word. Aigis inched closer to the door before he brandished his stick in front of her.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He barked, some saliva flying from his mouth. Aigis jumped backwards.

“To school? Class is starting soon.” Aigis replied, bewildered.

Gisela juggled a rock with one hand. “You’re not coming in.”

Aigis looked around. Her friends were all wearing the same faces. Their eyes were cold, their mouths were curled into an ugly frown, their arms were tensed, ready to strike. This clearly didn’t start from just some immature adolescent argument. This was hatred, plain and simple.

“We don’t allow Greenbloods in our school.” A random female student, Lina, spat.

“You don’t have evidence of that!” Aigis fought back.

“Oh, but we do,” Karl-Heinz shook his head in disapproval. He stepped to the side, revealing one of the propaganda posters obscured by his back. It was the one about Psychokinetics and the falsified link between them and harsh weather. “We’ve never had storms this bad in over a hundred years. My dad said so.”

Frieda remained silent. She continued to stand at a distance, frightened by the escalating tension.

“So we’re Psychokinetics because of rain?” Aigis berated her fellow 15-year-old.

“First, we get the nastiest storm in over a century,” Karl-Heinz began, counting off on his fingers. “Lightning strikes the town three times, my house gets washed away along with the rest of my remaining self-respect, and then you kill Otto and his mom—”

“Wait, wait, wait.” She butted in, waving her arms in front of the boy. “What do you mean WE killed Otto?”

Gisela shrugged half-heartedly. “You two were the last ones to see him before we found him hanging. *I’m* not saying it’s true, but from an outsider’s perspective—”

“Gisela, shut the hell up.” Aigis interjected. Gisela got a sour look on her face. Frieda took a tiny step towards the angry students.

“Um,” She squeaked. “Did you say ‘and his mom’?”

“Come on,” Gisela scoffed. “There’s playing dumb and then there’s this. You seriously haven’t heard what happened?”

Aigis swallowed to stabilize the dryness of her mouth. “What happened to Frau Pauline?”

Franz-Josef set his stick down. “They found Otto’s mom drowned in the Weser. They still don’t know what happened, but she probably drowned in the storm YOU caused.”

“The Kaiser was right,” Karl-Heinz shook his head. “Greenbloods don’t care about the collateral. They’re happy as long as they cause chaos.”

Aigis couldn’t believe what happened. The Golden Battalion and the German Empire’s hateful ideology had seeped its way into the minds of her best friends, rotting their minds. Aigis thought in the days leading up to the reopening of the school that the students would mourn Otto’s death together. To honor their friend. With the fear and paranoia in their eyes, it almost seemed as if this was their coping mechanism. To find a common object to terrorize, to release all their pain and anger on. They had no control over the unjust slaughter of their friend. But to trick themselves into thinking that they did by finding a new scapegoat would be a way for them to feel empowered, or to have an explanation for the sudden death. The worst part was Aigis got the feeling that no matter what she said to them or how she said it, her words would not penetrate their thick, hateful skulls.

Frieda silently snuck up to the door. The students backed away, readying their sticks.

“Where are you going? Stop!” Franz-Josef commanded. Frieda looked him in the eye for a brief moment before putting her hand on the doorknob to the school. At that moment, the boy’s brain shut off. His muscles tensed without a sense of direction. This magic girl was about to breach their defenses. Without them treating her and her sister, what was she going to do to them?

Franz-Josef swung his stick in a wide arc. Aigis could hear a sickening thud when the weapon connected with Frieda. A tiny shower of bloody mist spritzed in the air. Frieda fell face-first on the ground. Franz-Josef hyperventilated, clutching onto his wooden stick with both hands.

“Y-Yeah...! That’s right!” He sputtered, sweat pouring down his forehead. “You turn right on back home and don’t even look back, you hear?”

Frieda didn’t respond. All she did was nurse the side of her mouth, which now cradled a bruise on the inside of her cheek.

“When the Battalion comes back, I hope they—”

The boy couldn’t breathe. His lungs locked into a stasis. Franz-Josef could not move his neck, nor his legs. His eyes darted in every which way, desperately trying to make sense of the situation.

“What’s wrong?” Gisela asked. Franz-Josef continued to gurgle as his body began to levitate off the ground. His arms and legs were bent in unnatural directions. His eyes rolled to the corners. He saw an emotionless Aigis holding up a twitching hand.

Suddenly, Franz-Josef’s body flew backwards and shattered the window, breaking the old glass into a million shards. Tiny cuts appeared all over his body. His back scraped against the floor. Everyone in the class screamed and backed away, splitting away from the group. Aigis,

like a zombie, leapt through the open classroom window. The other classmates peeked their heads through the window from the safety of the schoolhouse walls.

Aigis picked the boy back up with a distant hand. She thrashed him about the whole interior of the building. Bouncing him from the ceiling of the floor, from wall to wall, he was treated like a ragdoll. He couldn't scream as the telekinesis binded his lungs, keeping even a microscopic dot of air from getting through. Aigis flung him into the faded chalkboard, the impact of his body hitting the board kicking up white chalk dust. His head throbbed and pulsed.

"Guys, a little help here?!" He cried. Karl-Heinz and Gisela backed away from the window.

"We did all we could do," Karl-Heinz surrendered. "Nothing could've prepared us for this."

"We'll remember you in our hearts, FJ." Gisela saluted goodbye before the other kids ran away, leaving him with the angry psychokinetic.

"Oh, come ON—!" Aigis choked the boy again. She slowly lifted his body higher and higher towards the ceiling. Franz-Josef could barely lift his head to look where his body was being taken. The old ceiling fan was spinning wildly above his head, the blades cutting the air with a sharp hum.

"Aigis..." He croaked out. His hair began fluttering under the fan.

"Aigis, c'mon. I'm sorry."

The air was now blowing on his skin. The blades were whirling closer and closer to his head. He got dizzy with how fast he was breathing, combined with the lack of oxygen from being magically strangled.

"Aigis!"

He was now level with the blades. He could now feel the air brushing against his scalp, threatening to slice him to bits. The boy shut his eyes tight. He didn't want to see what happened next.

A thud could be heard below him. He slowly opened his eyes. He stopped floating upward. He forced his head to look below him. Frieda was gripping onto the arm Aigis used to choke him. Aigis glared at her, but she didn't waver.

"Let him go." Frieda pleaded. Aigis looked up at Franz-Josef, then back at him.

"Look at what he did to you!"

"I'll be okay," Frieda gently put her hands over her sister. "Just let him go. Please."

Aigis looked down at the wooden floor. She hesitated for a moment. She dropped her hand. Franz-Josef fell to the ground and began coughing uncontrollably. His breath was ragged, his lungs were inflamed, and the inside of his throat burned. He tried to stand, but the boy could barely walk. He was so exhausted that the only thing he could do was crawl. Aigis stood over the oxygen-deprived teenager.

"You're lucky I have an amazing sister." Aigis threatened.

— *Some hours later* —

Ruheplatz had a jail, but no real police force. Only two volunteers conducted investigations and arrested unruly citizens. Those volunteers being Ziegler and Erwin. Ziegler wore thick bifocals while Erwin always carried a small notebook in his front pocket. They were inside of the Ackmann home, sitting at the dining room table. Erwin had an old, faded black and white picture of Otto's dad, Pauline and Otto himself one christmas. His dad was wearing his

army uniform and Pauline had her hand on Otto's shoulder. On the back, it read, "Merry Christmas 1909."

"How old was her son?" Erwin asked.

Ziegler looked up from the letter in his paper. "Fourteen."

"Damn. This war's turning our own people into monsters," Erwin shook his head. "Who would kill her?"

Ziegler scratched his beard. "Something tells me it wasn't a homicide."

"How could you be so certain?"

Ziegler flashed the letter in his hands. Says here her husband was an infantryman. Served in the imperial army for over twenty years. Letter here says he'd been killed in the Marne."

"I thought Marne happened a month ago."

"It did. Some people didn't receive their letters until just a few days ago. With Frau Ackmann, that was most likely the case."

Erwin took the letter and examined it. "October 6th, huh?"

"Seems like it."

"And her son died on the fourth."

"His body wasn't discovered until the next day."

"So you're thinking it was a suicide?"

"That's what the evidence points to."

Erwin sighed, blowing on the paper. "To lose both her husband and her son back to back..."