

Colin Jeffrey Cohen
colincohen@icloud.com

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LAST JEW IN JOSEFOV
by
Colin Jeffrey Cohen

Chapter 1

He thought he was about to be shot.

While the threat of death was always there, along with the feeling that some random and commonplace event would lead to it, that night he felt this was heightened and amplified, and it felt far more assured, and with this came a great sense of relief.

It all began when the old wooden door to his room, which was really just a large closet, creaked open. This was enough to wake him and most of the others there, who were sleeping on the three triple-decker bunk beds that were lumped together with no room to spare. He wasn't even sure what time it was or what had awakened him. He just knew that something was not as it usually was.

Following the creaking sound came the beam of a flashlight, which spread across the room much like the floodlights did outside the barracks, and he groggily raised his head off the makeshift straw mattress. He also lifted his hand over his eyes against the brightness and squinted toward the partially opened door, where he could see two pairs of eyes gazing at him from the nothingness.

“Weiss,” spoke a deep and gravelly voice, without any emotion at all. “Who here is Hermann Weiss?”

He nodded. He did as if he had been expecting them to come for him when he had only been hoping for it.

“Come with us,” continued the voice.

In the light, Hermann noticed the man on the top bunk across from his. Like many who had come and gone before him in that space, he didn’t know the man’s name. Still, he was quite familiar to him, as he had closely cropped hair much like his and his dirty and torn jacket and the tattered shirt underneath it in many ways mimicked his own. Looking at the man was much like looking at himself in a dirty mirror, at a scarecrow just like him. A scarecrow who was missing much of his stuffing.

This man was looking at Hermann, too, and he was smiling at him as well. The smile was both mild and forced, and Hermann believed that he was doing so because he, too, thought Hermann was about to be shot. But what Hermann couldn’t tell was if the man was sad or happy for him, and whether, regardless of which, he was envious.

Hermann, though, felt none of this ambivalence, and without further delay, he made his way down the beds to the tight opening on the floor between them. He did this to accomplish what he couldn’t accomplish himself. He couldn’t do what others had done, not even in the passive way some of them had. He couldn’t share complicity in his death. He needed the men outside the door to spare him of it, which is why he hurried toward them through the maze of twisted wood.

Finally, he reached the two large and well-armed SS troopers, and the three made their way forward in the dimness of the building, through the heaps of sleeping flesh in

front of them and behind them and all around them. Two centuries earlier, the Hanover Barracks quartered a few hundred Austrian soldiers serving Emperor Joseph II, but now it housed thousands of cattle, who Hermann believed, unlike him, would have to continue to wait their turn for slaughter.

It didn't take long before the three left the barracks, which left them in the center of the camp along its eastern edge, and they began marching both south and west into a dark and cool early morning in April of 1943. They marched past barrack after barrack. Some, like the Hanover, housed only men, while others housed women and children and the elderly, but they all were dark and silent and seemingly without life.

The night strangely reminded Hermann of the first night he spent at the camp eight months before. That night was a warm and muggy August evening, but it was the same exact night, followed by hundreds of others just like it.

Eventually, they passed the courtyard in the center of the camp, and they could hear dogs barking somewhere off in the distance, and Hermann wondered if these would be the last sounds of life he would experience. At any moment, he expected the troopers to put him up against a wall and release him from the flames to which he'd been consigned. But this did not happen. Instead, they marched him straight to the Czech gendarmerie near the southwestern edge of Theresienstadt, which housed those responsible for policing the camp. This surprised Hermann, but what surprised him even more was when they marched him inside the office and right up to Commander Janeček's door.

There he could hear the voice of Theodor Janeček, who was the head of police at the camp and a man more hated than all the Nazis there. The latter may not have liked the

rotting masses in their charge. They may have even hated them. But none enjoyed watching them bleed as much as Janeček. He fed off the misery the same way a vulture feeds off the dead.

“I don’t like this idea,” the man said, with a voice that rose and fell like a bad melody. “Not a bit. These Jews are a crafty —”

“— I did not ask your opinion,” interrupted the second voice. A voice that was just as familiar to Hermann as Janeček’s, if not more so, even if the source of this familiarity was distant and unknown.

A pause ensued, and one of the troopers took the opportunity to knock on the door.

“Come in,” shouted Janeček.

Forcefully, the trooper flung open the door, and he flung Hermann by the arm inside the room just as forcefully, where they saw a pale Janeček perched behind his desk. They also saw sitting in front of him a tall blond SS officer approaching fifty, whose back was partially to them. But in spite of this, and in spite of the man’s prematurely aged face, Hermann recognized Klaus Stamm at once, and he couldn’t stop his jaw from unhinging. This happened just as the two troopers saluted Klaus, with the one who had been doing all the talking calling out, “Herr Captain, we —”

“— That’s all for now,” Klaus interrupted, without even glancing at either the men or Hermann, and the troopers promptly backed out of the room, with the talking one closing the door as they left.

“You as well,” Klaus told Janeček.

“It’s against all protocols,” Janeček insisted.

Klaus didn’t exactly respond to this. He just stared at Janeček. He stared at him

blankly, with eyes that were burning with contempt.

Both recognizing this contempt and fearing it, Janeček jumped to his feet. He did this like a dog hopping in front of its enraged master, and he saluted Klaus and shouted as loudly as he could, “Heil Hitler!”

Again, Klaus just stared at him blankly. He did this until Janeček scurried out of his office and closed his door.

Hermann wasn’t sure what to do next. So, he just stood there and stared. He stared at the man who had once been his friend.

“Sit down,” Klaus ordered, as if Hermann were a small child that he was about to punish.

“Where?” Hermann asked.

“Where do you see a free seat?” Klaus asked back.

“Janeček’s?”

“Is there something wrong with it?”

Without answering, Hermann slowly stepped passed Klaus and the black attaché case lying by his feet, toward the police commander’s desk, where he sat. He sat across from Klaus, getting his first good look at the man he hadn’t seen in more than 20 years. “I’m really not surprised that you’ve become a Nazi,” he told him. “Or even an SS man.” But the truth was that both surprised him. He was surprised that the man he knew was so different from how he had known him. The two didn’t seem as if they could be the same.

“How are you?” Klaus asked, with a casualness that shook Hermann. Though he, too, was surprised. He was surprised at how bad his former friend looked, even though he knew that he shouldn’t’ve been. Still, he didn’t allow this surprise to show. He knew that

he couldn't. Instead, he tried to focus on his task, which was made more difficult by his fatigue. He was more tired than his face could ever express.

"How am I?" Hermann uttered, while being unable to hold back a grimace.

"As you can imagine, this isn't a social call."

"Yes, that I can imagine. But what I can't imagine is its purpose."

"I am provisionally the head of the Prague office of what is commonly referred to as the *Kripo*. The criminal police. But unlike in Germany proper, our office isn't staffed by career detectives. We simply don't have the personnel at our disposal. This means that, while we are capable of solving simple and ordinary crimes . . ."

"I still don't understand why you've come here."

"My office has spent the past few days sifting through the archives of the Prague Police, and it's come to my understanding that you were among the best detectives in Josefov, if not the best. It's also come to my understanding that you were someone who always embraced challenges, and, unlike many of your colleagues, even sought them out."

These revelations surprised Hermann, too. They surprised him almost as much as the man who made them. It wasn't actually the revelations themselves that surprised him, but that they once applied to him, as he also was now someone far different than the man who had been all those things before. "Both existed long ago," he muttered.

"Not that long ago," Klaus stated, almost as if he were postulating a mathematical proof.

"I guess it depends on how you measure time."

"We have a situation there. In Josefov."

“What does that mean?”

“In the last few weeks, three SS officers have been murdered in the district. Brutally.”

Hermann understood the words Klaus was telling him, but not their context at all. Which made them all seem nonsensical. “Why are you telling me this?” he asked, with his head shaking in a more or less continuous manner. “You can’t possibly think I care.”

“We would involve the local police if they weren’t so useless,” Klaus continued, as if he hadn’t heard what Hermann had said. Though the truth was that he just didn’t care what Hermann had to say. “We can’t tell if they’re all incompetent or are just acting that way.”

This made Hermann grin. He grinned at the way his Czech brethren were likely creating a quagmire of feckless acquiescence for people like Klaus. “You’ve read *The Good Soldier Švejk*,” he remarked, with the grin still on his face. “Passive resistance is ingrained in the Czech character.”

“But not in the Jewish one,” Klaus countered.

Hermann realized that Klaus was finally coming to the point of the conversation, even if he didn’t know what that point was. So, he asked him what it was.

“As I’ve already alluded to,” Klaus told him, “my office doesn’t have the capabilities to solve this case. To be honest, the SS is not adept at tracking down murderers anywhere, not even in Germany.”

“Maybe it’s because you give them medals,” Hermann told him back.

“And Josefov is alien to us. It’s alien even to me after all these years. We get lost just driving through it.”

“I still don’t understand what you want from me.”

“I’m authorized to offer you your old job back for this one case.”

Hermann wasn’t sure how to react to this. He didn’t know whether he should’ve been aghast or humored. Finally, he decided on apathetic. “Why would you think I’d take it?” he asked.

“I have in my jacket pocket,” Klaus answered, while slightly touching the garment, “papers approved by the highest echelons of the SS. They will provide you with safe passage across Axis lines if you succeed in finding those responsible for the murders.”

Hermann really didn’t believe that there were such papers, either in Klaus’s pocket or anywhere else, or that they would give them to him if there were. But even if he had believed everything Klaus had said, his answer would’ve been the same as it was: “I won’t do it.”

“You’ve misunderstood me, Hermann,” Klaus said, with his voice for the first time that night shifting just a little from its matter-of-factness, as this time he was unable to hide his surprise. “I wasn’t asking you. Either you come with me back to Prague and help me find the killer or those men outside the door will shoot you right now.”

Hermann didn’t respond to this. He just stared at Klaus blankly, much like how Klaus had stared at Janeček earlier, though with even more contempt. He did this because he was angry at him. He was angry that he was making him complicit in his death when he had expected the opposite. He wanted to scream at him, to demand that he’d be shot with no strings attached. But this in itself would be complicity.

“Well?” Klaus uttered, while feeling surprised yet again. This time he was

surprised by Hermann's lack of reaction.

"I'm thinking about it," Hermann growled, and he really was. He was thinking of some way that he could extricate himself from the snare that he had just been trapped in.

Chapter 2

She stood by the door in the cool darkness for many minutes. She did this not because she was frightened of what was outside, but because she felt a certain comfort inside the empty building. A feeling that she could be free of herself just as long as she was there. But it was now almost dawn and she knew that she had to leave.

Quickly, the door to the High Synagogue swung open, and this woman, who was wearing a paisley shawl over her head and shoulders, just as quickly scurried out of the building and into Červená Alley. In the same motion, she closed and secured the door, and she stepped further into the brisk and damp and somewhat foggy evening before turning left at the end of the alley onto Maiselova Street, where she made her way south down the silent cobblestone sidewalk. She did this as if she were gliding through a cloud, and as if nothing could possibly get in the way of her doing this.

Watching her through an ancient and narrow stone window was a small and gaunt man, who was standing on the second floor of a building a block north of the one she had just left. This man stared at her like she was some kind of an apparition, like she was

something that just couldn't be.

Finally, this feeling passed, and he slapped onto his head the black visor that had been lying on the table beside him, and he ran down the stairs and out of the Old-New Synagogue, not far from the corner of Maiselova Street, to which he sped.

"Stop right there!" he called out to the woman with a squeaky voice as soon as he reached the mouth of the alley and spun toward her, but she ignored him and continued gliding through her cloud. "I'm with the SS!" he added.

Still, she ignored him, and with great anger he awkwardly withdrew his pistol and rushed after her down the cobblestones. He rushed with the gaze of a predator in pursuit of its prey, and he kept rushing until he reached the doors of what was once the Jewish Town Hall. There he stopped and aimed his gun at the woman.

"This is your last warning!" he yelled, and he was just about to fire when the woman seemed to disappear in the light fog. This caused confusion to cross his face, and it only deepened when he began to hear sounds. The sounds of stomping feet. They were loud and steady and approaching from somewhere unseen, and his gaze turned at once from that of a predator to that of prey.

Chapter 3

Over the sounds of musical instruments tuning in the courtyard not far away, Hermann stood in front of a full-length mirror in the dimly lit gendarmerie closet. He did this while putting on the musty and heavily wrinkled off-black suit Klaus had given him. Not unexpectedly, it was too big on him. Clownishly too big. Not that this was Klaus's intention. There just weren't any suits Hermann's size. Not in the camp or anywhere else.

Glancing in the mirror, Hermann saw something more than just a clown. He saw one with a hollow face that was complemented by a set of sunken eyes and a complexion that was almost as coarse as sandpaper. All of which made him look far older than 47. He didn't quite look as old as Klaus, but it was close, and his recent shave and shower had only accentuated this. Which made him wonder if the reason for both were to make him look somehow even more ridiculous.

While trying not to think about this, he started knotting the thin and crumpled black tie Klaus had also given him. He knotted it into a Windsor. He had done this countless times in his life, so he didn't need to think about it. He could just observe a

mirror that was reflecting something that resembled him but wasn't him.

This caused him to come to a quick stop. He stopped with both the tie and the absurdity of the entire situation, and he called out Klaus's name, truly believing that this humiliation had made him no longer complicit in whatever would come next.

"Yes," Klaus uttered, from the other side of the closed door just a few steps away, with a voice that was so full of weary that it was begging for rest.

"I've changed my mind," Hermann said to him. "I want . . ."

Hermann couldn't finish this thought. He couldn't because he saw something. He saw a woman. He saw his wife Ana. He saw her not in the mirror or in the closet or even in his imagination. He saw her in a different place and time. He saw her in a memory, which took him back to a midday afternoon in his old apartment on Eliška Krásnohorská Street in Josefov, and he had a good idea as to about when this was. He knew that it must've been not long after the Nazis had closed his wife's art gallery, as all her unsold paintings were standing on easels in their living room, much like a bunch of huddled urchins.

Officially, the gallery's closure was due to the Reich finding her work a form of "degenerative art." But Hermann knew that they applied this definition inconsistently and only when purposes suited them, such as when punishing the wife of a prominent Jew.

At this moment, Ana was staring at her paintings, much as she had been doing often as of late, from her rocking chair nearby. She stared while seeing her whole life's arc in her works, from her carefree student days to her search for some greater purpose as she approached mid-life, all the way to the despair of the occupation, and she couldn't help think that both her work and she herself were like a piece of art that would never be

fully realized or completed.

Hermann, too, was staring at the paintings, and he noticed how her subjects had grown progressively darker in recent years. Her early works, while not exactly joyous, had expressed at least a yearning for joy and all the hope that accompanied it. But her newer works expressed only the inevitability of disappointment and ruin. This was especially true of her latest painting, which depicted the buildings in their neighborhood leaning over each other in the dead of the night, looking as if they would collapse on top of each other at any moment, with their apartment building in the very center of this.

Soon, both their staring was interrupted. It was interrupted when an envelope came sliding under their front door. Hermann walked over to it and picked it up, and he opened it and found an official-looking letter inside it, along with a large handful of stars made from cheap yellow cloth.

Ana took both items from him, and after reading the instructions in the letter, she collected his coats from the nearby closet and his jackets from the bedroom a short distance away.

“I won’t wear them,” he called out, while she was still inside the room. “I won’t. *V žádném případě!*”

She didn’t respond to this, not even to the demonstrative affirmation of his intentions in Czech. A language she long knew he spoke to her whenever he was dead serious about something and wanted her to know this. She simply returned from the bedroom with the garments and her sewing kit, and after giving him a smile that muted all his fury, she sat back in her rocking chair and began working, happy to take her eyes and mind away from all her misery.

While he watched her sew the stars into his clothes, all Hermann's fury came roaring back and then some. A fury that was so out of character for him. It was bad enough that he had to suffer the humiliation of the stars, but it was even worse that she was made part of it. Because of this, he stormed up to her and grabbed the envelope from the armrest before ripping it into shreds. He also grabbed his clothes from her. "I'll dare them to shoot me," he hollered. "I'll go down to the street right now and dare them!"

Calmly, she stood up and shook her head. She did this in a slow but nearly continuous manner, which was something she always did whenever she wanted not to express disapproval of his actions, but when she wanted him to do so himself.

"They're just going to shoot me anyway," he insisted, while wanting to cry but not being able to make it so.

"But not now," she insisted back, before grabbing back all the clothes from him. "There's still now, even if now lasts only five minutes more."

Again, she sat back in the rocking chair, and again she began sewing. She did this while realizing that her life's arc was not in the paintings, after all. They were nothing but representations of it, while the real thing could be found in the man standing beside her. The man who had stood beside her through all of it. It was through him that her story had been told over and over again, and she knew that she and her life would always be complete as long as he continued to stand there.

"You must promise me," she told him, while continuing her work, "you must promise me that you'll always wait those five minutes."

"I won't," he told her back.

But she just smiled once more. She smiled because she had heard the promise in

his voice, and she knew that he had heard it as well.

“You’ve changed your mind about what?” growled Klaus, causing the closet and the mirror and all of Hermann’s current reality to return. Though that didn’t mean Ana had gone or that his memories of her had left him. They were still there with him and so was the promise he had made to her.

Just a few hours earlier, when Hermann acceded to Klaus’s demands, he thought that he could still change his mind, that he could change it at any time as long as he found some reasonable excuse to do so. Though he now saw that this was nothing but a lie he had told himself. He realized now that he couldn’t have complicity in his death no matter what excuses he made. Ana had seen to this, and he knew now that he would live as long as he possibly could. He knew that he would even pursue the murderer of Nazis if it meant living for another five minutes more. But that didn’t mean that he would like it or that he would put any real effort into it. He promised himself that he would *švejkovat* his way through the entire case, just like the anti-hero in Hašek’s famed novel, who resisted authority at every turn through sheer and willful incompetence. He would do anything but actually help them.

“Are you coming out,” Klaus added, “or are my men coming in?”

Still, Hermann said nothing, and he tried to do the same. He tried and tried.

Chapter 4

Hermann opened the door, and he stepped out of the closet and into the office, where he saw Klaus glaring at him nearby with his arms crossed. He also noticed how the man was struggling to stay awake. He looked as if he might fall asleep on his feet.

“There’s no star,” Hermann said, while pointing to the chest pocket of the jacket he was wearing.

“It’s not needed on you,” Klaus told him, without the slightest tinge of humor in his voice. He also didn’t wait for any reply. He just walked over to his black attaché case and picked it up on his way out the door, and Hermann followed, with the two SS troopers following him.

It was a cold and cloudy morning that they made their way through, and they could feel the wetness hanging in the air. Though for Hermann this was brightened and warmed a bit when they entered the courtyard in the center of the camp, which was once the town’s marketplace back when it was actually a town.

In this courtyard, something resembling a music pavilion had been erected, and

Hermann saw Karel Ančerl and his orchestra of fellow inmates preparing to play. Live music, theater, and art were some of the many things that distinguished Theresienstadt from other concentration camps farther east, along with a fleeting notion of license. Though Hermann was not sure at all that this made the camp better. He was actually inclined to believe that it made the place even worse, by creating a false feeling of normalcy.

Karel was a pale and serious-looking man in his mid-thirties, and as Hermann approached him that day, he recalled how he and Ana had watched him conduct the orchestra at the Prague Free Theater on Vodičkova Street many years earlier. With more than a little surprise, Hermann realized that the man looked exactly how he remembered him. The Nazis could starve him and dehumanize him in every way they could, but they couldn't alter him in any meaningful way. This made Hermann realize that, while the Nazis could make him look like a clown, it was up to him to decide whether he would play the part.

Closer and closer the four men got to the orchestra, and it began to play. It played Bedřich Smetana's "Vltava."

Hermann had heard this song many times in the more than twenty years he had spent living in the country, including a number of times in the camp, as it was in many ways one of the country's national songs. In some ways it was even more of a national song than "Where Is Our Home," which was the actual anthem of the country. The song, which was the most famous of a set of symphonic poems Smetana wrote that he called *My Country*, followed a pair of small springs in the Bohemian countryside as they grew into the winding river that would split Prague into two before careening its way toward

the Elbe.

While listening to the orchestra perform that morning, Hermann recalled all the many people he had known, including Ana, who were enraptured by the song and continued being so no matter how many times they had heard it. But it never really meant anything special to him. He always made himself believe that this was because he wasn't Czech. Though he knew that it was more than just that. The song, while beautiful, for some reason always seemed a little off to him. That is, until this particular performance.

During this performance, as the song propelled itself toward its climax, Hermann could feel the freezing waters of the Vltava River flowing into him and all around him, and he could feel its currents pushing him toward somewhere. A somewhere that he couldn't see, but a somewhere that he knew he needed to go. The river did all this while at the same time drowning him in tears that were only partially his own.

Eventually, the four men reached both the orchestra and Ančerl, who noticed both Hermann and those accompanying him. Like the man across from Hermann in the barracks the night before — the man whose name Hermann didn't know — Ančerl smiled at Hermann. He smiled with the same mild and forced smile, and Hermann believed that this was because he, too, thought Hermann was about to be shot.

But at least it would not be here, Hermann told himself with his own mild and forced smile. Nor would it likely be in one of those camps farther east where they now sent people from Theresienstadt every day. It would hopefully be in his hometown, where his Ana was, and he knew that he would have no complicity in it at all.

This last thought made his smile both stronger and less forced. It did so because he now knew that he could only gain from whatever would happen next.

He was still smiling as they approached the camp gate. On the other side of this gate, he knew, was the black and white sign on the archway. The one he saw upon entering the camp all those months earlier. It was a sign that he could somehow see even from this side of the wall. A sign that read *Arbeit Macht Frei*: Work Sets You Free.

Only now could he see its truth, and he felt himself racing toward it.

Chapter 5

A Mercedes-Benz 770 left Theresienstadt. Sitting in its back seat were Hermann and Klaus, and the latter took a deep breath of the stale air inside the car, relieved to be finally leaving the camp. He was even more relieved than Hermann, and without thinking he allowed his eyes to close, which quickly brought sleep upon him.

At the same time, the car reached something of an impasse: a countless mass of men, women, and children who were walking in the opposite direction, flanked by a handful of soldiers.

Slowly, they passed through them, and Hermann noticed how they were struggling not only to walk to the camp but also to carry what was left of their possessions as they made their way from the Bohušovice train station a couple of kilometers from there to what would be for many their final destination. Among these people one in particular stuck out to Hermann. It was a little girl, who caught his attention by carrying a broken doll that seemed to reflect all the fears her face was unable to express itself.

Hermann continued glancing into the crowd as they drove by. He looked hard and long, and eventually he saw something else. He saw himself, among people just like them. He saw this in another memory, in which he was carrying his lone suitcase in one hand and a crumpled-up pink slip of paper in the other. He was also constantly looking back with his horrified face, even though he knew that there was nothing more to look back upon.

Soon, Hermann returned to the Mercedes. He did this as the vehicle reached the train station and all the empty cattle cars on the tracks, which were waiting there to collect more cattle. But these cars suddenly weren't empty to Hermann. He was crouched inside one of the middle ones, pressed by the unseen masses against a splintery wooden gate, where his eyes had been pressed ever since catching his last glances of Ana at Prague's Hybernské Train Station.

This memory didn't last long, either, and he found himself back in the car when it came to the end of both the street and the town. There it turned right, onto a long and empty country road in the direction of Prague.

At the same time, Hermann happened to be looking at the front of the car, and he watched the SS flag on the hood standing almost still in the wind, acting in defiance of it. He stared at this for many minutes. He stared at it until he saw a large truck turn right just ahead of them from the opposite side of the road.

Still not accustomed to seeing vehicles driving on the right-hand side of streets, he instinctively flinched a bit, thinking the truck would surely smash into and over them. But it didn't. It didn't even come close. Instead, it made its way into the left lane as if this were the most normal thing. Though this was actually more shocking to Hermann. It was

shocking to him that not only did it take the Germans only a few days to make the entire country drive on the right-hand side of the road but that they had further so quickly conditioned everyone to make it a part of their nature. It was shocking to realize just how easily a whole nation had conformed to the will of another.

This led Hermann to glance at Klaus, who was sitting next to him and writhing in his sleep. He was tossing and turning, and it was clear to Hermann that Klaus was in the midst of a great struggle. He was writhing so much that Hermann thought of waking the man, until he remembered that Klaus was no longer his friend but his enemy.

Still, watching Klaus writhe made Hermann uncomfortable, and he quickly turned away from him. It was then that memories overtook him once more and the car and everything inside it changed. It changed into a very different car: the train car that took Hermann to Prague for the first time, more than two decades earlier.

It had taken him three connections and nearly a full day to make it from Uzhhorod, which was a frontier city way out east, in a region that had just been incorporated into the new Czechoslovak state. Making the journey even more tiring was that these three trains came after it took him many more days just to get to Uzhhorod from his rural home, where he said a long goodbye to his mother and father one last time.

Parting was especially bitter for Hermann's mother, who cried in his arms before he left. She cried even harder than she had before he left for the army many years earlier. She did because she knew that this time it was likely for good.

"You'll come and visit us in Jerusalem, won't you?" she mumbled in between her tears, even though they both knew that the only Jerusalem she would ever see was in her dreams.

“Yes, Mama,” he told her, before starting down the dirt road with his heavy trunk, which he did without looking back. He simply waved as he went.

Now, his father was crying, too. He was crying not because he was sad, but because he was happy. He was happy Hermann was realizing the dream that he had never been able to realize for himself.

Back in the train to Prague, Hermann arrived just after mid-day in what had only recently become the capital, marking the first time that it had been the capital of an independent country in 300 years. Having survived the journey mostly on a cheap deep-fried bread called *lángos*, Hermann was not only exhausted but also hungry. Still, he jumped off the train with his trunk before it even came to a full stop at the newly christened Wilson Station, which had been named after the American president who had played an influential role in the formation of the republic.

That day, Hermann was a much different man than the one who was leaving Theresienstadt. He wasn't just younger. The five years he had spent in the army had thickened him in many places, and he looked sharp in the hand-tailored suit his next-door neighbor Mr. Jacobs had made for him. It was a suit that he had saved more than 3 months to purchase, and that was just for the cost of the materials. The old man actually provided his labor for free, as a thank you for all the snow Hermann had cleared from the walkway of his home from the time Hermann had been a boy.

In spite of his fancy suit and all his thickness, Hermann looked much like a boy as he made his way through the crowded station. Even though he was already in his mid-twenties, he was often mistaken for a boy, too, and not just because of his youthful face. Complementing this were his large head of thick brown curls, which were the envy of

every woman he encountered and needed trimming twice a week. What's more, he was psychologically much like a boy as well, despite all the horrors he had experienced during the war.

Hurriedly, Hermann rushed out of the station, and he briefly thought about splurging for a cab, especially when he experienced the hot and thick late summer air. But quickly realizing that he needed to conserve his limited funds, he instead walked his trunk to Wenceslas Square and from there headed down the kilometer-long road in the direction of Charles University, where he had been recently accepted into the law faculty. Many decades earlier, the 500-year-old school split into separate Czech and German colleges, reflecting how the population of the country was split into Czech and German speakers, and the latter of the two was what he would soon attend.

Despite the heaviness of his trunk and all his weary, the walk to the school seemed short to Hermann, especially as never once did his jaw stay hinged. He even forgot all about his hunger and his now ever-increasing thirst, in spite of the smells of the sizzling kielbasas coming from all the vendors lining the streets and the odor of fresh pilsner drifting out of the many pubs he passed along the way. This was because the walk into and through Old Town was like making his way through all the fantastical tales his father had once told him. Tales filled with ghosts and golems and impossibly beautiful women. In many ways, the trip was like walking through the man's dreams. Dreams the man had evoked in him as well.

During the many years Hermann had spent in the army, he had been through many cities. Some of these were even bigger and older than Prague. But none was anything like it. Prague was a place that time had forgotten, with every building

seemingly more ancient and more magnificent than the next. He felt that with every step he was taking he was walking deeper into a past that just kept expanding before him.

Finally, he reached the Karolinum, which was the seat of the German college and almost as old as the university itself. The collection of buildings there especially mesmerized him, as he knew his future was intertwined with them. They mesmerized him so much that he didn't even notice entering the lobby of his dorm with his trunk. He didn't notice anything until he saw the line of men waiting their turn to register. From the expressions on their faces, it looked as if they had been waiting in that line for as long as he'd been traveling, if not more so.

Hermann didn't even think about waiting in this line, as he had spent way too much time waiting in lines during the past 5 years. Knowing that he could likely register at some other time, he went in search of his room. It took him quite some time to find it, perhaps even more time than he would've spent waiting to register. But he eventually found it on the top floor, and he rushed inside it, where he saw the strangest of sights. He saw a tall and muscular young man about his age, who had a big flock of wavy blond hair and the brightest blue eyes he had ever seen. At that moment, this man was doing handstand push-ups against the far wall with his shirt off and sweat glistening off his bare chest.

Hermann didn't know what to make of this or how he should react to it, so he just dropped his trunk by the unmade bed in the far corner of the room and gazed curiously at his new roommate.

"You must be Klaus," he said.

Klaus made no reply. He just kept doing push-ups. He did them even faster than

before. Up and down he went as if he were racing against something unseen, and Hermann wondered if he were perhaps afraid of coming to a rest. Afraid of what might happen if he did.

Eventually, Hermann introduced himself, and while Klaus didn't say a word in return he did respond. He did a dramatic backflip to his feet, and with a big toothy smile, he approached Hermann. He further shook his hand with his firm but moist grip, and Hermann at once could see all sorts of confusion fall across Klaus's face.

"What's wrong?" he asked, more than a bit worried.

"Nothing," Klaus insisted. "I, I just wasn't expecting . . ."

"You did know that I was Jewish?"

"Oh, it's not that. It's just that I was expecting, you know, a big giant warrior."

"Looks can be deceiving," Hermann told him with a grin.

"Did you bring your medals?" Klaus asked, with lots of excitement.

"It really was nothing," Hermann said, while feeling all kinds of embarrassment and hoping that they could change the subject quickly. It was the same embarrassment he felt whenever anyone broached the subject, and it had nothing to do with any modesty on his part. Even worse, just the mention of the war was enough for the sounds to return. The deafening sounds of gunfire and screaming coming from all directions, especially from him. Sounds that refused to end or to even pause for the briefest of moments.

"I served, too, you know," Klaus went on, causing the sounds to finally stop ringing in Hermann's ears.

"Yeah?" Hermann muttered, while looking more than a bit dazed.

"Not on the front lines, though."

“You were lucky then,” Hermann told him, after sitting on his bed while wishing he had been so lucky.

“It’s strange how many freshmen here are in their twenties,” Klaus continued, unaware of Hermann’s discomfort. “Some of the seniors are pushing thirty. And some of the doctoral candidates, some of them will be pensioners before they get their degrees.”

Both men laughed at this, and Klaus began to take off both his pants and boxers. “You like beer?” he asked.

“I think it’s gone well past like,” Hermann answered.

“How about joining me and my girlfriend at U Zlatého Tygra tonight?” Klaus asked next, as he picked up a towel off a nearby closet doorknob and wrapped himself with it.

“Could we do it some other time?” Hermann asked, while trying to hide his embarrassment once again.

“What’s wrong?” Klaus asked back.

“Nothing,” Hermann insisted. “It, it’s just that I need to find a job first.”

“You have no money?”

“Sure, I have money. Just not a whole lot of it.”

“I thought you people were all rich.”

“Unfortunately, it’s not so. You don’t know how much I wish it were.”

“Well, the fencing club needs a manager. I’m already the captain, so consider the job yours if you want it.”

“That would be terrific.”

“And I’ll front you some money until then.”

“I couldn’t let you do that.”

“You can and you will. You’re coming out with me and Ana tonight, and I won’t listen to another word about it.”

Hermann smiled at this. He did while watching Klaus march to the door, and he uttered, “You have a girlfriend already?”

Klaus responded by coming to a stop, and he turned back to Hermann with a big grin and said, “I’m only surprised that it took me so long.” He further pointed to a bureau by his bed as he left and added, “Her picture’s over there.”

As the door closed, Hermann told himself that he was not going to look at the picture of Ana. He even told himself that it didn’t matter what she looked like and that she had nothing to do with him. But slowly he made his way to both the bureau and the picture standing on top of it. Something about it both enticed and excited him, and this only increased the closer he got to it.

Finally, Hermann was in reach of the picture, and after just a flicker of hesitation, he grabbed it and looked at the image of a woman who was in her late teens. It was an image that made all of Prague seem bland and ordinary in comparison.

It wasn’t Ana’s beauty that swept Hermann off his feet, though she was indeed beautiful. It was this spark she had in her eyes. Never had he seen anything so aspiring before, or even imagined that he could be so aspired by something. He quickly realized that she was the kind of woman who could lead a man to something much bigger than himself, and he realized, too, that this was something he both desperately wanted and needed.

Though the photograph soon faded away, along with the memory of it, and it was

replaced by a much different image. From the Mercedes, Hermann could see that Prague was now very much on the horizon.

At the same time, Klaus awoke. He awoke with a face full of fright, and the sight of the city didn't ease this a bit. It actually only made everything worse.

Chapter 6

The Mercedes reached the Golden City, and it soon approached Prague Castle.

For many minutes, Hermann just stared at the towering 570-meter-wide structure, which was more than 1,000 years old and dominated the skyline of the city. It in itself was a living fairy tale that not even the mind of Walt Disney could contrive, and as they got closer and closer to it in the early afternoon sun Hermann could almost hear his father describe it in perfect detail: the palaces and the churches and the towers rising from everywhere. He could also recall all the princes and princesses he imagined living there when he was a boy, and he was able to forget his situation and everything associated with it.

Eventually, the car reached and passed the castle, but Hermann was still able to forget. This was because — much like the Old Town area he had walked through on his first day in Prague — the Hradčany neighborhood he now found himself was a snapshot of some lost time. A time that not even the Nazis could corrupt. It somehow impressed him even more than Old Town had impressed him more than twenty years earlier, and he

knew that this was probably because he never thought he'd ever see it again.

But this wonderful reverie didn't last long, because the car parked, returning Hermann to the present. It parked right in front of a block-long baroque building on Loreta Square called Černín Palace. As it did, Hermann noticed through the back window of the car the 17th-century church across the way called the Loreta, which was a few decades older than the palace and stood both in opposition to it and over it. This positioning was not lost on Hermann, as while before the occupation the palace had housed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was now the headquarters of the SS.

With a bit of a grin, Hermann looked away from the church, and he glanced at Klaus and noticed that he wasn't making the slightest effort to leave the car. "Are we waiting for something?" he asked.

Klaus didn't respond. It didn't even seem as if he heard the question.

"Klaus?" Hermann murmured.

"As you can probably guess," Klaus uttered, without looking at Hermann, "this whole affair has been embarrassing for us, for many reasons. No one outside a handful of SS officers knows all that you now know about this case."

"And you want me to keep it that way."

Klaus didn't exactly provide an answer to this, but his silence was all the answer Hermann needed. It confirmed everything he believed about the nature of his task and what would be the final outcome of it, and he couldn't help but grin once more.

Finally, the two men left the car, and after making their way through a set of guards at the door, they stepped inside the building, followed by the two troopers, who kept their distance many steps behind the pair. It was at this moment that the four found

themselves in a marble hallway, which featured an immense statue of Hercules battling the Hydra. Hermann involuntarily came to a stop in front of this, along with everyone else, and just as they did a large and heavyset SS colonel approached them from the staircase hallway. This man was nearing sixty, and he was marching alongside a small and gaunt captain less than half his age, who was smiling smugly at Klaus.

Reluctantly, both the colonel and the gaunt captain stopped, and Klaus saluted the colonel with a decidedly forced reverence.

The man acknowledged this with a slight nod before turning toward Hermann and sneering. He sneered because he found Hermann to be a living caricature of everything he had long hated, and he took his presence in the building as a personal affront.

Hermann didn't acknowledge the sneer or the man behind it in any way, but he did recognize what the colonel himself was about at once, having known many like him in the previous war. He saw in him a man who could never accept his own limitations, and he knew that it was men like him who did more to help the Central Powers lose the first world war than anything the enemy had done.

"So," the colonel growled, with the type of deep baritone voice Hermann expected the man to possess, "this is the Miracle Jew who is going to save us from that terrible killer."

Hermann said nothing, and neither did Klaus, and the colonel turned to the latter and added, "He doesn't look like much to me."

"But that didn't stop the Austrians from giving him the Order of the Iron Crown for his actions at Verdun," Klaus insisted, causing Hermann to glance away, while once again feeling overwhelmed by the sounds of war and all that they evoked. Even many

decades after the fact, the war and its mentioning still affected him and he knew that he likely would never escape this. “The emperor pinned it on him himself,” Klaus added, “after he single-handedly saved a dozen wounded men from a British assault while wounded himself.”

“Still, consider me skeptical.”

“We’ll know soon enough if your skepticism is confirmed, Herr Colonel.”

“Captain Weber here believes that he can solve this crime in very short order, and I’m inclined to believe him.”

“It’s simply a matter of being persuasive enough with the local riffraff,” the small and gaunt man interjected with a voice that squeaked, and as his smile became even smugger than before he added, “and I can be quite persuasive.”

“Yes,” Klaus dryly noted, “it’s remarkable how you’ve persuaded every commanding officer to keep you out of harm’s way.”

This remark wiped the smug smile from the captain’s face at once, and he was just about to retort when the colonel interrupted him by saying, “This is not the time or the place. Captain Stamm has earned the right to conduct this investigation as he sees fit. But I’ll be keeping a close eye on both you and the Jew.”

Klaus responded to this by both clicking his heels and saluting the colonel, who growled: “At ease.” He did this just before marching straight through Klaus and Hermann as if he were smashing through a wall, followed by Captain Weber, who was again smugly smiling at Klaus.

While watching the two men exit the building, Klaus whispered to Hermann: “That’s Colonel Reidl. He was not exactly enamored by the idea of bringing you in on

this case.”

“So, how did you get him to agree?” Hermann asked.

“It wasn’t me. It was the lack of any viable alternatives. Still, you’d best be as invisible as possible to him.”

Hermann nodded, and the two along with the guards continued on. They proceeded to the staircase hallway, and from there they rose to the second floor with Hermann staring at the painting on the ceiling. He stared at it until they reached the top of the staircase, at which time they made their way into the north wing of the building, where they soon came upon a reception area.

By a desk in this area sat a woman in her mid-twenties, who had long light brown hair and similarly colored eyes and was wearing a dark blue dress. “Herr Weiss!” she blurted out the moment she saw him. She did this with lots of shock, and she jumped to her feet and rushed over to him.

With lots of affection, the two embraced, and he whispered into her ear: “Marta.”

“What have those animals done to you?” she whispered back, with her voice breaking in many places.

“I’m fine,” he insisted, and they slowly released their arms from each other.

“I was so sorry to hear about Ana,” she murmured, with her eyes lowered a bit. “She was very kind to me.”

Hermann didn’t know how to reply to this, or even how to react to it, so he just smiled meekly. He also said, “So, they’ve got you working here, too.”

“Yes,” she said back. “They didn’t even tell me why or for whom. They just told me to report here this morning. I had no idea I’d be working for you again. Or that you

were even . . .”

“They probably wanted to bring back as many of my old cohorts as possible.”

“There are not too many of us left.”

Hermann nodded, and they ran out of things to say, making both of them look uncomfortable.

“You,” she mumbled, “you must be starving. I, I mean . . .”

“It’s all right, Marta. Really.”

“I could get you a couple of *utopence*,” she quickly uttered, while pointing out a nearby window and across the square. “U Černého Vola makes them much the way you like them, with lots of onions.”

“That would be terrific,” Hermann told her, with a smile that reflected all the warmth of her sentiment, and he suddenly found himself holding back tears, whose source he neither knew or understood. “And perhaps you could also get me some —”

“— Some Velkopopovický,” she cried out, after lifting the flower vase that had been standing on the table beside her, which she did just before removing its dying flowers.

“You can still read my mind,” he told her, with yet another smile. This one expressed all the many things he couldn’t put into words.

She smiled as well, and she started backing up with the vase. “I won’t be but a minute.”

Quickly, she turned around, and she started sprinting off.

“Oh, Marta,” he called out. “Perhaps you could make it —”

“— Three *utopence!*” she called back, after stopping and spinning back toward

him with three fingers held high in the air.

Again, he smiled. This time he smiled not only at her and all that made her so wonderful, but also at how such wonderfulness could still mean something to him. He also found himself for the first time in years anticipating something positive.

Chapter 7

In the small and cluttered room that was now his office, Hermann sat at a wobbly desk and chair across from Klaus as he ate the cold pickled sausages Marta had brought him.

Having been systematically starved for the last 8 months, Hermann thought that he would devour the meal in seconds and still be hungry for more. But oddly this did not happen. He was full even after one sausage and thoroughly stuffed after two, and this angered him a bit. He felt cheated by his own stomach, which just wasn't accustomed to eating such quantities of food, much less good food.

Still, in spite of his lack of appetite, he very much enjoyed the odors rising from the plate, which brought back all sorts of wonderful memories. Mostly, it brought back memories of his Ana, who would spend weeks at a time preparing *utopence* for him, using her own special recipe, which was adapted from all the years she had spent making them for him. During these weeks, he would often catch her in her flowered apron sneaking something else into the big pickle jar by the kitchen window, whether it was

peppers or onions or things he couldn't even recognize. This, in turn, would only cause his anticipation of them to rise, and it would continue doing so until he finally had the opportunity to enjoy them.

But while Ana's *utopence* were the best he ever ate by far, it wasn't the taste of the food that he loved the most. This was actually only a small part of what they meant to him. What really mattered to him was how he could taste her love for him in every single bite. In spite of their inherent coldness, the sausages generated their own special and unique warmth that never ceased to induce wonder in him.

Because of this and many things like it, Hermann always tried to show his appreciation of Ana as best he could, whether it was in the form of a night on the town or some small tokens of affection, like roses or chocolate. But he wondered at this moment if he had done nearly enough. He wondered if she really had known just how he felt about her and how he valued everything about her and all the time that he had spent with her.

Knowing that he would never know the answer to this, he refilled his nearly empty glass. He refilled it with the Velkopopovický Kozel Beer from the flower vase, and he took a long and slow sip of it. Even in its weakened 8-degree state, which made it about 3% alcohol, it was enough to numb his guilt just a bit. Guilt that had many sources.

"Don't get too drunk," Klaus told him.

"Not even you could get drunk off this beer," Hermann told him back, before grabbing the thick and round loaf of rye bread that was beside the plate and tearing off a big chunk, which he used to soak up the pickle juice, along with lots of onions. He did this while muttering, "So, are you going to show me the details of the case?"

“Perhaps you should finish eating first,” Klaus said.

“Trust me,” Hermann told him, after forcing himself to both chew and swallow the bread, “I’ve learned to eat through anything.”

Klaus made no response to this. Instead, he picked up his black attaché case off the floor and placed it on the table. He also opened it and took from it a folder. This he dropped in front of Hermann, who opened it and found three full-sized photographs of the dead men’s faces, each displaying varying degrees of horror.

Even before going to Theresienstadt — even before he became a policeman — Hermann had long been inured to such sights, and to much worse ones, and he matter-of-factly put the images side-by-side on the desk in front of him and started reading the police reports that were underneath them in the folder.

“The causes of death were all different,” Klaus told him, despite knowing Hermann could read this himself, and Hermann could only surmise that he did so either to speed up the discovery process or to make himself seem a little relevant in an investigation that Hermann saw was way over his head. “But the causes were all similar,” Klaus went on, “a broken neck, a strangulation, and a blunt blow to the back of the head. That’s just what killed them. There were also broken limbs and assorted internal injuries. What links them all together besides being found near synagogues is that they were all found sitting up, either against a wall or a set of bushes, and, as you can see, they all seemed frightened of something.”

Hermann tuned out Klaus after this, and he concentrated on the facts in front of him.

These began a little more than two weeks earlier, at the very end of March. A

local Czech policeman named Petr Hrubý, while walking his rounds late one night just before dawn, found the body of Captain Ernst Schiller sitting against an apartment building across the street from the Maisel Synagogue. At first, he thought that the captain was drunk, but when he tapped the man's shoulder with his billy club, the man fell over onto the ground, and he quickly discovered that the man was deceased. Though Schiller's neck was broken, there were no signs of any kind of struggle at the scene of the crime, nor have any witnesses been found who can remember seeing the captain in Josefov that night, including seeing him sitting against the wall.

The coroner estimates that Schiller died much earlier than when he was found, well before midnight. The last known person to see him alive was his wife Sieglinde. They were about to see an opera at the Theater of the Estates on the night of his death when a lieutenant unknown to both of them arrived at the theater and led the captain away. Frau Schiller was only able to provide a very basic description of the lieutenant, and the exact whereabouts of the captain from the time he left the theater to the time the policeman found his body are entirely unknown.

The second murder occurred 3 days later. At a little after 10:00 at night, a local resident named Radoslav Hrabal, while walking his dog, found Captain Franz Gruber sitting against shrubberies not far from the Moorish-looking synagogue that was once known as the Temple on Geist Alley, which some refer to today as the Spanish Synagogue. Unlike with Captain Schiller, the coroner estimates that his death occurred at around the time he was discovered, or at least within a few hours of it. Also unlike with Schiller, no one can account for any of Gruber's whereabouts that evening. He left duty at five o'clock and no one knows what he did or where he went afterward. He left no wife

or any known girlfriend or lover, and he was said to be a loner without any friends at all.

Gruber died from a blow to the back of the head, and once again there were no signs of a struggle at the scene and there were no witnesses who could place the captain in the district at all that night.

The body of the final murder victim, Major Max Fischer, was discovered nearly a week after Gruber's murder. He was found at 9:00 in the morning by an SS lieutenant named Greta Krieg. She discovered him sitting outside the Klausen Synagogue, where she currently works, and she indicated that she had seen the man at the synagogue often in the past month. She further said that the last time she saw him there was late in the afternoon on the day he died. This was when she left the building for the day.

Major Fischer was strangled to death, and like with the other crimes, there were no signs of a struggle. There are also no witnesses to the crime before or after it happened apart from Lieutenant Krieg, and no one else is known to have seen the man from the time the lieutenant left the synagogue in the afternoon to the time she found him in the morning. Like Gruber, Fischer had no wife or girlfriend, and all his known friends have said that he had been distant toward them in the past month or so. The coroner estimates that he died sometime during the night before, though it was likely somewhat later than the other two murders. That is, closer to midnight.

After finishing reading all of this, Hermann turned to Klaus, and he said, "I don't believe that these reports are completely accurate."

"In what way do you think they are not accurate?" Klaus asked, with a bit of surprise.

"There must have been at least some small piece of evidence left at the scenes of

such violent encounters. Some item the killer left, such as a button or even a footprint.”

“I’m telling you that there was no evidence found of a crime whatsoever at the scenes. At least, none that we noticed. But understand that no one in my office, including myself, is a professional detective, and we have not allowed the Czech police or anyone else to investigate the scenes.”

“I further don’t believe that there were no witnesses at all. Three separate murders in the streets of Prague and no one saw a thing? I realize that Josefov has far fewer people than it had before the war, but it is still in the center of the city. There are still people living in it and passing through it all the time.”

“No one has come forward. There are only those material witnesses mentioned in the reports.”

“Can I talk to them?”

“Tactfully.”

“We can start with the wife of the first victim.”

“Frau Schiller?”

“Yes, her.”

“What about the policeman? We’ve already interrogated him.”

“But you didn’t discover anything useful from him at all, did you?”

“What makes you so sure of that?”

“I’m sure of it for the same reason I want to interview Frau Schiller instead. She is likely the only person who could give us some direction in her husband’s murder.”

“She lives just a few blocks from the crime scene, so I can show you that before we speak with her.”

Hermann nodded, and he put the photographs on top of the police reports before closing the folder. He also wiped his mouth with a napkin and rose to his feet. "Let's go," he said.

Klaus, though, didn't move. With a face full of skepticism, he grumbled, "Where is all this sudden enthusiasm coming from?"

Hermann thought about this question. He thought about it for a long moment, as he was surprised by it. Was he really being enthusiastic? he asked himself.

Perhaps he was, he realized, at least a little, and this confused him as much as it had confused Klaus. It even made him feel strangely guilty.

Why? was the next question he asked himself. Why was he enthused when only a few hours earlier he fully intended to just go through the motions or even hamper the investigation as much as he could?

He answered aloud, and as honestly as he could: "Maybe I enjoy the thrill of the chase more than I imagined. Or maybe, maybe I just want to shake the killer's hand. Does it really matter?"

Klaus answered back by rising to his feet, and he started toward the door.

Chapter 8

Hermann and Klaus returned to the Mercedes, and its new driver took them through Hradčany again before crossing the river over the Mánes Bridge, and from there it headed north into Josefov along Maiselova Street.

From the back seat — with his eyes as wide as they could be — Hermann looked out the side window, at the neighborhood where he once lived and where Jews had been living for a thousand years. Not that many years earlier, there were upwards of twenty thousand of them packed within an area of what now consisted of only a few dozen streets, but now he was the only Jew left.

As they slowly passed building after building that afternoon in heavy traffic, it seemed to Hermann that each building evoked its own set of memories in him, with some of these being more alive than others. One of these he experienced when they reached a café across from Jáchymova Street. There he found himself and Ana passing away one of the many Sunday mornings they passed there together. On this particular morning, they were reading through the latest editions of *Lidové Noviny* and the *Prager Tagblatt* while

sipping on cups of Turkish-styled coffee. They were also congenially arguing over the latest doings of President Masaryk and the current of a nearly endless array of prime ministers that served during that period of time.

Ana could see no wrong in either man, especially in Masaryk, who in many ways was the father of the country. They even named a train station in Prague after him while he was still alive. But Hermann was more critical of both men. He felt that they were, however unintentionally, alienating the country's large German minority, and he was prophetic that there would be consequences to this. It would be the excuse Hitler would use in 1938 to "free" the Sudetenland in the north of the country, under the terms of the infamous Munich Agreement, which would be the precursor to Hitler freeing the rest of the country less than a year later.

Wondering just how real this particular memory was, Hermann slowly reached his hand over the table and took Ana's. Remarkably, it was just as warm and soft and comforting as he remembered it. It also gave him a certain strength of purpose, which was something that he really needed at the moment, and it continued doing this even after the memory of her faded and he found himself back in the car.

Gently, Hermann felt all over his hand, and he realized that if he could both touch and hold on to these memories, they were as real as anything he was experiencing.

The two men's destination was only a short distance away, and the car pulled up in front of the gates of the dark and empty Maisel Synagogue. This is when Klaus spoke the first words he had spoken to Hermann since the two had left the palace: "I made arrangements for you to stay in your old flat on Eliška Krásnohorská Street."

"Oh," Hermann muttered, more than a little surprised by the news and perhaps a

little frightened because of it as well, as some memories he knew were best left unrelived.

“Is there a problem with that?” Klaus asked, sensing his former friend’s ambivalence.

“No,” Hermann insisted, but even he could hear the hesitancy in his own voice.

“Unfortunately,” Klaus went on, “there isn’t much furniture there, and it’s more than a bit of a mess. There will also be a guard at your front door at all times. But it was either there or a cot in the office.”

Hermann didn’t respond to any of this, and the two of them stepped out of the car, with Hermann following Klaus. He followed him to an apartment building across the street from the synagogue. There Klaus pointed at a wall and said, “The policeman mentioned in the report found Captain Schiller sitting upright over there.”

At once, something caught Hermann’s eye, even if he wasn’t sure why it did. It was a crack in the wall, and while taking a closer look at it, he noticed that it didn’t seem to be the type that naturally appears on concrete over time. It seemed to him as if some blunt force created it, so he let his fingers glide over it in order to feel how deep it was.

“Surely, you don’t think the killer caused that?” Klaus uttered.

“It may have happened somehow during the course of the struggle,” Hermann uttered back. “Can we find out if the crack was here before?”

“I can have someone contact the owner,” Klaus answered, before pointing down the street, in the direction from which they had come, and adding, “The captain’s widow lives right down there on *Staromák*.”

Hermann found it a bit odd that Klaus had used the Czech slang term for Old Town Square. He did until he recalled their college days together and remembered how

Klaus was always consumed by all things Czech, no matter how hard he tried to pretend that he wasn't. He was especially consumed by the language and all its peculiarities and anomalies. At the time, Hermann even thought that Klaus secretly wanted to be Czech, but that he kept this from everyone, including from himself.

While smiling a bit at this, Hermann got back in the Mercedes with Klaus, and the driver drove them a block up the road to Široká Street, where he had hoped to make a right turn before making another right onto Pařížská Street one street up, which would have in turn led them to the square. But instead he was forced to make a left on the one-way street, and they got tangled in a maze of roads that some might have thought were designed specifically to make foreign invaders lose their way.

It didn't take long before the car was hopelessly approaching the Vltava River to the west instead of going south toward the square, and they might have even driven right into the water if Hermann hadn't guided the driver to Sanytrová Street, which led them eastward through the maze until they finally reached Pařížská and made their way down to the square.

"How am I supposed to investigate a crime when I literally can't drive even two blocks without getting lost?" Klaus asked, to no one in particular.

"I'm sorry, Herr Captain," the driver muttered, "I thought for sure that I could make a right down Široká."

"Half of it does go eastward," Hermann told the man, "but only west of Žatecká Street." Hermann further turned to Klaus and said, "You used to know these streets as well as me, if not better."

"That was a long time ago," Klaus insisted.

“Not that long ago. Do you remember the night when we got so drunk at U Hynků that we set off to look for that legendary street from which there was no possible exit?”

“Zatracená Street,” Klaus murmured, with just a hint of a smile on his face, and Hermann could see just a little spark of the old Klaus in his eyes, which made him uncontrollably want to see more. “The Street of the Damned,” Klaus continued, while recalling all the joy of that moment and of so many moments like it all those years earlier. “We would’ve found it, too, if the sun hadn’t come up that night. We were so close to it. I’m sure of it.”

Klaus’s spark, though, didn’t last long. Soon, they parked right above the square, and Klaus and Hermann silently walked toward the three-story apartment building of Frau Schiller, with Klaus’s head down the entire way. Just as silently, the pair climbed up to the top floor and went to one of the units there, where they knocked on the door.

Answering this door was a servant woman, who brought them to the lady of the house, who was deep in the process of preparing to move, with big boxes lying in almost all the free space. So, she was not too pleased that they had interrupted her. She was especially not pleased by Hermann’s appearance, and she tried to convince Klaus that she had no time to talk.

“Please, Frau Schiller,” Klaus told the woman. “We are trying to find your husband’s murderer. We won’t take more than a few minutes of your time. I promise you.”

The woman sighed, but she acquiesced. She further asked her servant to bring them some coffee, and the three of them sat in the living room together, which had a bay window that provided a perfect view of the square below, especially of the statue of Jan

Hus that stood in the center of it. This was something Hermann gazed at. He gazed at it while thinking back to a much different and better time.

“When will you be moving?” Klaus asked, with Hermann’s mind still on the statue and the moment he had once experienced underneath it.

“In a few days,” the woman answered, while glaring at Hermann uncontrollably. “To be honest with you, even a few seconds in this city is too much.”

Suddenly, the two were interrupted by the servant, who laid a silver coffee service onto the table in front of them, and Frau Schiller served coffee to both Klaus and herself while pretending Hermann wasn’t there. Oddly, this was what brought Hermann’s attention back from the statue toward her, and he said, “I read your statement, Frau Schiller. But in my experience people often leave out small but not insignificant details from them. So, I do hope that you don’t mind going through the events once more. What do you recall about the night your husband was killed?”

At first, the woman didn’t want to answer Hermann. But when she noticed that Klaus was waiting for her to answer as well, she grudgingly and with a voice clearly perturbed said to Klaus: “We were at the Theater of the Estates to watch *Don Giovanni*.”

“What a marvelous opera,” Hermann said back, with a bit of a grin, while recalling how he and Ana had seen it at the very same theater before the occupation. “Is Ezio Pinza still performing the title role?”

“Right before the performance began,” the woman stated, again directly to Klaus, “a lieutenant came up to my husband and led him off on what he said was an urgent matter.”

“I guess he didn’t mention what this urgent matter was,” Hermann said.

“No,” the woman said back.

“And you don’t know this lieutenant’s name?”

“No.”

“Or what he looked like?”

“Everyone looks the same to me in a uniform, even my husband. The man was . . . I don’t know, average. Average height, average weight. Unimposing, I would say as well, much like you. He was young, too. But they’re all young.”

“You never saw him before that night?”

This particular question caused Frau Schiller to think a bit. She did this before answering: “Once. I’m pretty sure that I saw him once before.”

“You didn’t tell my men that before,” Klaus uttered, while looking both surprised by the woman’s answer and a little embarrassed.

“Your men didn’t ask me that before,” she uttered back. “They just asked me if I knew who he was, and I don’t.”

“Where did you see this man before?” Hermann asked.

“I . . . it was a party at Colonel Mueller’s home, I think. Yes, it must’ve been there. This was a month ago or so.”

“What time did your husband leave the theater?”

“I don’t know exactly. I had no reason to look at my watch or at any clock. But, like I said, it was right before the opera started.”

“8:30,” Klaus stated. “It started at 8:30.”

“Are you sure about that?” Hermann asked him.

“I saw the opera maybe a week beforehand, and, no, Ezio Pinza no longer

performs in the title role. The Americans, in fact, arrested him last year.”

“What a pity.”

Turning back to the woman, Hermann said to her: “Tell me: did your husband have any enemies?”

For the first time since the conversation had started, the woman looked at Hermann. She did so with a big sneer before growling, “You.”

“You mean he didn’t like Jews.”

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

“What I mean is someone in particular. Someone who had a personal reason to cause him harm.”

Again, the woman turned her attention to Klaus, and she said to him: “People feared my husband. But they could never hurt or even scare him. He was the strongest man alive, and he feared nothing. Not even going to the Russian front.”

With no more questions left to be asked, the interview ended, and Klaus and Hermann said goodbye to the woman and left both the apartment and the building, and they started off for the car.

“I’ll contact Colonel Mueller when we return to the palace to see if he can’t identify this average and unimposing lieutenant,” Klaus said, as they walked across the cobblestones, which quickly exhausted both men, who were already more than a little tired. “At the very least he should be able to give us the names of everyone at the party.”

Hermann nodded, and he told Klaus: “It would also be interesting to know if either of the other dead men attended this party.”

“I’ll find out.”

“You may also want to watch the other synagogues in the district.”

“You think he will kill again?” Klaus asked, with some surprise.

“Why wouldn’t he?” Hermann asked back.

Klaus had no answer for this, and Hermann yawned. He yawned long and deeply.

“You look tired,” Klaus remarked.

“Looks aren’t always deceiving,” Hermann remarked back.

“I’ll arrange for some guards and transportation to your flat when we get back to the palace. We can visit the second murder scene in the morning.”

Suddenly, Hermann didn’t look so tired. Instead, he looked just a little frightened.

Chapter 9

Slowly, the door creaked open, and with heaping doses of hesitation Hermann took a single step inside his old apartment.

It was at this moment that Hermann saw that Klaus had been right about the state of the unit. The place was a mess, with broken walls and garbage strewn everywhere. It also had been stripped of everything of value. Pretty much the only things remaining were the memories, which were there in abundance.

While taking another step inside the room, Hermann heard the guard in the hallway close the door behind him, and he realized that he had just become a prisoner in his own home. But it was still a far better prison than his previous one, and it was also much better than sleeping in the office.

He continued forward, and he made his way over some empty easels on the living room floor. There he stopped and turned toward the kitchen, where he saw the large and empty pickle jar by the window just where Ana had left it. He also noticed an upside-down picture frame on the floor nearby, and he walked over to it and picked it up, and

through the broken glass he looked upon an image of Ana and himself on their wedding day.

The image brought the day back to life for him. He was back in Mr. Jacobs' suit and back in the fragment of time in which he was carrying his new bride inside their apartment for the first time. A bride who was wearing a simple white dress and gripping a flower bouquet.

This was after a short and basic ceremony at City Hall that both their families had boycotted. There hadn't even been a single guest to witness the event. Still, the two were overcome with all the possibilities that lay in front of them. Hermann, in particular, was glowing. He was glowing even more than the bride. He was also punch-drunk from all the kissing they had been doing in the aftermath of the ceremony. He was so intoxicated with his new life state that he couldn't even feel the burden in his arms, and he could only barely sense the aroma from her perfume that was rising to his nose.

"It's not exactly Bled," he told her, referring to the mountain resort town in Yugoslavia that he had promised to take her for their honeymoon when they first got engaged. Which was something that didn't happen because they ended up getting married much sooner than they had planned, and he had no time to save for it.

"I don't need any Bleds," she told him back, while feeling at that moment he wasn't so much holding her up as he was keeping her from smashing through the ceiling. Moreover, she had this feeling that, as long as she was in his arms, they could take her wherever she wanted to go.

"We'll make it there one day," Hermann went on, "when I'm the richest lawyer in Prague, and you're the most famous artist in the city. We'll stay right on the lake — at

the best suite in the Grand Hotel. And I'll carry you right up all those 99 steps I told you about. *Přísahám!*"

Ana smiled at the oath he had just taken, knowing that the only one that would ever really matter to her was the one he took earlier in the day, and they both giggled for no reason at all, before he spun her around till everything went black.

Once again, Hermann was staring at the broken picture, and while recalling how he thought that he'd never be happier than he was at the instant the photograph was taken, he removed the shards of broken glass from the frame and put the picture on the empty mantle, just where it had been before and where it would always belong.

"*Miláčku,*" cooed Ana, voicing her pet name for him. This caused him to spin his head around, and he saw a far more recent edition of his wife teasingly skipping into the bedroom, and he rushed after her.

Though when he sprinted inside the room all he saw was a further mess, including the remains of their featherbed on the floor, along with a single bare pillow on top of it. It was on these two things that he collapsed, and on softness he could only dream about during the previous eight months he grabbed the pillow, and he clutched it while rolling himself over and over the bed. He rolled himself into a tight fetal position. Eventually, he came to a stop, right at the edge of the bed, and with his eyes tightly closed he cried out to his wife in her mother tongue: "*Aničko moje! Proč? Proč?*"

He wanted to know why. But he didn't get an answer to this. Instead, as he opened his eyes, he found himself as a young man. He was also running, running down Husova Street in Old Town, trying to find U Zlatého Tygra. At this moment, he was more than an hour late for his get-together with Klaus and Ana, which was the result of him

getting lost in the city for the first but not the last time.

Only moments earlier, he found the street, after spending the previous half-hour following all the conflicting directions he had been given from the many passersby he asked, and he was certain that Klaus and his new girlfriend had already left and would never talk to him again.

Though, finally he found the pub, and at the very second he rushed inside it he saw not far away a smiling Klaus, who pointed to three full beers sitting on the large communal table in front of him, and he called out, “You are way behind, my friend.”

Hermann smiled back at his roommate, and he rushed up to him, just as the waiter brought a 4th beer to their table and tried to put it beside the others.

“No,” Hermann tried to say to the man, while he frantically waved him off. “This is more than enough.” But the waiter didn’t listen. He just put the beer down with the others and rambled off.

“They just keep serving them here,” Klaus told Hermann, “whether you ask for them or not.”

“Or whether you’re here or not?” Hermann demanded.

“We have three seats, so we keep getting three beers. You either drink up in this place or you get the hell out.”

“I guess then, I guess I better start drinking up.”

To this end, before he even sat down, Hermann grabbed one of the beers. He did this just as the woman across from Klaus rose from her seat and grinned at him. Little did Hermann know from her picture that Ana was nearly a full head taller than him. But he did know that this should have bothered him and dramatically diminished the way that

she had aspired him. He actually wanted it to. He wanted to feel decidedly unaspired. He wanted it badly, and for a number of reasons.

But nothing could do this. Not even when the memory of her was replaced with his single bare pillow. The feelings she had evoked in him so many years earlier was still lingering with him, and so was she.

Chapter 10

When Klaus left Černín Palace, the sun was just beginning to fall in front of him, and as soon as he walked out the door he saw his Mercedes and the driver inside it waiting. But he also saw something else: U Černého Vola across the square.

Recalling the smell of the beer coming from the flower vase earlier, Klaus had an overwhelming desire to follow the source of it and drown himself in it. He even took a few steps toward the pub, and he did for many reasons, including the possibility that it could help him avoid all that came whenever he shut his eyes. But knowing that the beer would do a lot more than this and knowing that this would get in the way of all that he had to do, he instead turned around and rushed into the back seat of his car, and he ordered the driver to take off at once.

Quickly, the car sped off, and once again it made its way not only through Hradčany and over the river but also back through the maze, and it returned Klaus to Old Town Square, which was only a short walk to his final destination of the evening: Železná Street. This was an ancient cobblestone road that led from the southern end of

the square, and Klaus noted upon gazing at it from the opposite end of the square that it was shaped almost like one of the cracks he and Hermann had found on the wall across from the Maisel Synagogue.

Without much enthusiasm, Klaus began to march. He marched over the square and over its cobblestones. He marched toward Železná, and when he reached the corner of it he stopped and turned back to the square and to a sun that had almost completely set. This is when the memories began to flow.

Unlike Hermann's memories, Klaus's didn't come to life in front of his eyes. His churned over and over in his mind through a series of high-speed imagery, and it kept doing so until he wanted to scream. It was badness topped upon even worse badness, all of which was growing and threatening to explode in his head.

In one set of these images, he saw himself drunkenly stumbling out of The Eldorado club on Berlin's Kant Street in the mid-1920s late one evening. It was so late that the streets were empty. But they weren't for long, as two men came running out of their nearby parked Dixi 3/15 and accosted him, and they began beating him against one of the walls of the building.

Even in the pathetic state he was in, Klaus could've easily handled the men, but instead he egged them on. He wanted them to hurt him and destroy everything he hated about himself. He begged them to do this. He also laughed at their blows in spite of their increasing savagery. He laughed until he couldn't laugh any more.

Turning from this sight, Klaus saw U Hynků. This was the pub Hermann had mentioned a few hours before. It was one of their favorite drinking spots when they were in college, and once again he had an overwhelming urge to drown himself, and maybe for

good, and once again he took a few steps toward this. But again knowing that dropping in such a hole would only prevent him from doing what he desperately needed to do, he forced himself to turn around, and he grudgingly made his way to his destination.

Slowly and indirectly, he moved in its direction, and he eventually stepped through the arched entranceway of Number 18, which was a 16th-century building that looked even older than that. Inside this was both a courtyard and a set of old stone steps, and up the latter he climbed to the second floor, and he shuffled from there to a nearby door, where he both sighed and rang the doorbell.

Almost at once, the door swung open, and a tall blonde-haired and blue-eyed servant in a pristine black uniform greeted him and let him inside, right before taking his overcoat.

“The lady is getting dressed,” the woman said, while nodding toward a closed door down the corridor.

Klaus nodded as well, and he slowly shuffled toward the door, with the servant scurrying off in the opposite direction.

“Is that you, Klaus?” came another female voice. This one came from behind the bedroom door, and it voiced itself just as Klaus stopped in front of it.

“It’s me,” Klaus answered, matter-of-factly. He did this while staring at himself in a mirror at the end of the hallway.

He looked so old, he thought, and he felt even older. He looked and felt so different than he had only a few years earlier. If only this had all happened then, he told himself, when he was still a young man, maybe he could be more certain of the outcome of all that was to come.

"I'll be ready in a few minutes," the woman went on.

"All right," Klaus mumbled, and he tried not to cry, even though he wasn't sure why he wanted to do this.

"Will you be staying over tonight?"

"If you don't mind."

"You know I don't. You're always welcome here. Where would you like to go tonight?"

Klaus tried to come up with an answer, but after repeatedly coming up empty, he said to her: "You, you think we could just stay in tonight?"

"Are you not feeling well?" she asked.

"I'm feeling suddenly tired. But if you really want to go out . . ."

"I think staying home tonight would be a wonderful idea. I'll have Kamča cook us up something. Is there anything in particular you would like?"

"Anything would be fine."

"Are you sure that you are just tired? You sound a little off?"

"I am a little off. Or maybe a lot off."

"What's wrong, dear? Does it have something to do with this nasty investigation you've been involved with?"

"I guess so."

"I know you can't discuss the specifics of it with me, but can't you at least tell me what's bothering you?"

"Nothing's bothering me."

"Did you have some kind of a setback today?"

“Actually, it was quite the opposite. I have every confidence now that the case will be resolved presently.”

“Shouldn’t that make you happy?”

“It should.”

Suddenly, the door to the bedroom creaked open, and Klaus turned to it and to the beautiful woman standing behind it, who was wearing an elegant white gown and who had the biggest of smiles on her face. In many ways, he adored this woman. She was a wall that he could always lean on, and he knew that there was safety with her. A safety he couldn’t find anywhere else. But at the same time he found her draining in many different ways, which was the last thing he needed or wanted right now.

Trying to ignore this, he forced not only a mild smile upon her but also the even milder belief upon himself that her appearance had brought him some kind of joy.

Chapter 11

Hermann woke when the rising sun began seeping through the drapeless bedroom windows. Despite the state of his bed, sleeping on feathers was still a lot better than sleeping on straw, and despite all the mixed feelings he had about returning home and all the bittersweet memories it had evoked, it was still the best night of sleep he had since leaving Prague. Not only did he feel almost rested, but for the first time since that awful day he didn't feel cold or feel the slightest bit sick. He almost felt something approaching good, and like the day before he felt strangely enthused about working on the case, and again he felt a little guilty about this.

Trying not to think about it, though, he washed and groomed himself as best he could while looking at himself in the broken mirror of the bathroom. He further approached and opened the front door of his apartment. There the burly guard standing outside it led him downstairs and outside the building to his far slighter colleague, who was sleeping in the back seat of the car that had driven Hermann home the night before.

The man wasn't asleep for long, and while the two guards made their way into the

front seat, Hermann entered the back, and they soon began driving through the maze and over the river, to the palace on the other side of town. They did this with Hermann just as awed by the neighborhood as he had been the day before. He smiled the whole way through it.

A little later, when they arrived at the palace, it was still early in the morning. It was so early that Marta hadn't even come yet, and she was someone who had always been early to work and always there well before Hermann.

With nothing to do and no one to talk to, Hermann went to his new office, followed by the two guards, and while they waited outside the door he again reviewed the police reports, specifically that of the second man killed.

The victim was found on Dušní Street, began the report on Captain Gruber, sitting against shrubbery not far from the Moorish-looking synagogue that was once known as the Temple on Geist Alley, which some refer to today as the Spanish Synagogue. He was discovered a little after 10:00 at night by a local resident named Radoslav Hrabal, who had been out walking his dog.

While he finished reading the last lines, Hermann's eyes both tired and closed, and he fell asleep. He also dreamed. He dreamed of nothing in particular, but this was still a better place than where he was.

Chapter 12

Klaus was also dreaming. But his dream was of anything but nothing. It was another one of his nightmares, much like the one he had in the car ride from Theresienstadt, and like the ones he had been having for a long time. He not only twisted and turned in his sleep but he shook the bed as well. He shook it so hard that he eventually shook himself onto the floor, and this is when he finally awoke.

Frightened, he only became more so when he saw the clock on the wall and the time it projected, and he hurriedly dressed while not even bothering to comb his hair. He just grabbed his black visor off the bureau and flung it on top of his head, and he rushed out the door while throwing on his jacket.

“Kamča?” he loudly whispered down the corridor.

Quickly, the woman hurried out of the kitchen.

“Can you get me my overcoat, please,” he told her.

“Of course,” she told him back, and she rambled off.

“Is that you, Klaus?” came another woman’s voice, from inside the kitchen.

“I overslept,” he growled to her.

“I would’ve woken you if I had known that you needed to get up by a certain time. I’ve been up since dawn.”

“It’s all right.”

“Would you like some breakfast? Kamča baked fresh *rohlíky* this morning. They melt even before reaching your mouth. You barely need to butter them.”

“I can’t. I’m late already.”

“How about dinner tonight?” she asked, just as Kamča brought him his overcoat, which he quickly put on.

“All right,” he told her.

“Do you want to eat in again tonight?”

“No, we can go somewhere.”

“Are you sure?”

“More than sure.”

“How about U Bílého Lva? That way, you won’t even have to pick me up. I can meet you at the palace.”

“That’ll be fine,” he uttered, as he marched to the front door. “I’ll see you then.”

Chapter 13

Hermann awoke the moment Klaus came through his office door, and he noticed the guards standing outside it.

“My aide earlier this morning talked with the owner of that building from yesterday,” Klaus told Hermann from the threshold of the room. “He says that he doesn’t think that there was a crack in the wall before. But he can’t be completely certain.”

“What about our average and unimposing lieutenant?” Hermann groggily asked through a yawn.

“Colonel Mueller says that three or four different men could match the description. He gave me their names, but Colonel Reidl doesn’t want you questioning them. Instead, he’s having Captain Weber question them.”

“What about the other dead men? Were they at the party?”

“Major Fischer was, but not Captain Gruber.”

“Can we talk to the man who found the body at the Spanish Synagogue?”

Hermann asked next, while pointing at the police report. “Mr. Hrabal.”

Klaus responded by motioning toward the hallway with his hand, and Hermann slowly rose to his feet. This happened just before the two made their way down the corridor, and they quickly approached the reception area and Marta's desk.

"Herr Weiss," she uttered, as she rose to her feet with a piping hot cup of coffee in her hand and lots of surprise on her face. "I was just about to bring this to you. Was I late this morning?"

"I very much doubt it," he said to her with a smile, as she gave him the cup, which he downed in one gulp."

"Herr Weiss," she mumbled, with even more surprise, "that was scolding hot."

"I know," he said back, "and you don't know how much I appreciate it."

Glancing at Klaus, Hermann could tell that he was anxious to get going, so he returned the cup to Marta and started off.

"Is there anything you want me to do today?" she asked, causing Hermann to stop and turn back to her. "I was terribly bored yesterday."

"As a matter of fact," he told her, "you can be of great help to me and our investigation. The Jewish community, before they left town, so to speak, likely assigned responsibility for their synagogues and other properties to some local individuals or companies. If you could do some research at City Hall and find out exactly who is responsible for the six synagogues in Josefov, I'd greatly appreciate it. I'd also like to know everything you can find out about these people themselves."

"When do you need this by?" she asked.

"There's no rush. Accuracy is far more important than speed."

Marta nodded, and Klaus and Hermann continued down the hall. "Are your men

watching the synagogues?” Hermann asked him.

“I couldn’t get it approved by Reidl,” Klaus answered.

“Why not?”

“There is a war going on. Men are needed for more important things.”

“I can imagine.”

Hermann said this just before the two began descending the stairs, and they soon passed both Hercules and Hydra and exited the building, and they approached the waiting Mercedes, whose engine seemed to start upon sight of them. Though just before they got to its doors, a female voice stopped them. It did by calling out, “Klaus!”

Turning toward the voice, Hermann saw a beautiful woman in her mid-thirties rush toward Klaus, wearing an expensive black coat and equally expensive black shoes. She also had a big flashy smile on her face. But this wasn’t what he really noticed about her. What he really noticed was how she looked like a character straight out of some Wagnerian opera, with long and curled platinum blonde hair and pale blue eyes. Her skin was also so fair that Hermann wondered if this were the first time the sun had set upon it.

Still, there was something about the woman that made Hermann think that she wasn’t quite the archetype she was projecting, even if he didn’t know exactly what this something was. So, while he felt an instant and visceral dislike toward her because of everything she seemed to represent, he found her at the same time intriguing and captivating. He couldn’t stop looking at her and wondering about her.

“You left your wallet,” she said to Klaus, after stopping in front of him, and she reached into her black purse just as Klaus’s face turned bright red. In the same motion, she pulled out a large leather wallet and handed it to Klaus, who tersely thanked her

before stuffing it into his jacket pocket as quickly as possible.

While he did this, she glanced at Hermann, and an uncomfortable silence overtook all three of them, which was driven by the same thing: the utter incongruence of Hermann and Klaus together. The woman gawked at this incongruence for many seconds while trying to make some sense of it. But unable to do this, she eventually turned to Klaus and uttered, “Well?”

“Excuse me?” Klaus uttered back.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me?”

It was clear that Klaus really didn’t want to do this. He looked as if his mind were fumbling for some way to avoid any kind of introduction, and this is exactly what it was doing. But when no excuses could be found, he told her Hermann’s name and added, “He’s an old, an old friend of mine.”

“Strange,” the woman remarked, before turning back to Hermann and continuing her gaze, though this time with a bit of a curious smile. The source of this was that she found Hermann interesting. She found him interesting in so many ways that she wasn’t sure which one was the most significant. The only thing she knew for certain was that she wanted to know more about him. A lot more. “I don’t think he’s ever mentioned you before,” she said to him.

“I’m easily forgotten,” Hermann said to her back, causing Klaus to sneer a bit at him from behind the woman. Klaus further pointed at the woman and grudgingly said to Hermann: “This is my lady friend: Gertrude Gross.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Hermann uttered, with a forced smile.

“I don’t think I’ve ever met any of Klaus’s old friends,” she went on.

“Perhaps he doesn’t have many,” Hermann noted, while noticing that Klaus was again sneering at him, and sneering far stronger, which Hermann couldn’t help grin at.

Though Klaus’s sneer didn’t stay on his face for long. It faded the moment Gertrude spun back toward him, which was just before she said to him: “Of course, you’re inviting Hermann to join us for dinner tonight. He looks as if he hasn’t eaten in weeks.”

“I, I’m afraid he’s terribly busy,” Klaus muttered.

But Gertrude was persistent, and she let Klaus know that she’d get her way one way or the other, and finally Hermann agreed to the invitation. Which caused Klaus to sneer a third time at him, with this one being the strongest and most serious of the three.

Not seeing this, Gertrude smiled at Hermann, and she said, “Eight o’clock, at U Bilého Lva. It’s not far from —”

“— I know where it is,” Hermann insisted.

This caused Gertrude to smile even more at Hermann, and she cooed, “You don’t know how much I’m looking forward to it.” Which she really meant. She didn’t even know if she’d be able to wait through the entire day.

Chapter 14

Once again, Hermann had to guide Klaus's driver through the maze of Josefov. This time, they had to go way to the east of their eventual destination, by driving down Dlouhá and Kozí streets before coming back around Věžeňská, and even with doing all this they still had to park a good distance from the Spanish Synagogue and walk through a long courtyard to reach the apartment building just beyond it.

"I only accepted her invitation to avoid a scene," Hermann told Klaus during the walk through the courtyard, after sensing his agitation. This broke a long period of silence between the two that began the moment Gertrude returned to her car. "You can make up some excuse for me tonight."

"She'll just reschedule it," Klaus told him back. "Like she said, one way or another she always gets what she wants."

"I apologize then."

"Don't pretend that you're sorry, or that you've ever been sorry for anything you've done," he retorted, with a sudden and unintended burst of anger, which he

immediately regretted. He regretted it so much that he reminded himself to stay focused on the task in front of him instead of a past that was behind him, to which he could never return.

“You’re wrong about that,” Hermann insisted. “I’m sorry for lots of things I’ve done, and I’m even more sorry for things I didn’t do. I’m sorry for things that I can never apologize for.”

Klaus made no reply to this, and the two men reached Dušní Street, where they stepped inside a five-story apartment building across from the synagogue. They further climbed up to the fourth floor. There Klaus knocked on a door just down the corridor from the staircase, and a tall and elderly man greeted the two with lots of friendliness and did so in Czech.

Klaus responded in the same language, with perfect fluency, telling the man what they were doing there and what they wanted from him, and with great excitement the old man led the two inside his flat and up to a window that overlooked the synagogue, so he could show them where he discovered the body.

“*Pane Hrabale,*” Hermann began, with a clear lack of confidence in his words, while his mind fumbled for just the right ones to add after it. Despite having lived in Prague for more than twenty years with a native Czech speaker, this was not enough to turn him into a perfectly fluent speaker himself, in spite of how much he loved the language and how much he enjoyed both speaking it and peppering his sentences with it.

Hermann found in the Czech language a beauty that was missing from all others he had known or heard, including his own. A big part of this was the strange musical quality he found in it, which was something that never ceased to cause him wonder. He

often noticed how Czechs sang when they talked, without even realizing that they were singing, and he found this romantic. During his life, he had seen many operas that weren't as melodious as an ordinary everyday conversation between two random Czechs.

But Hermann's problem was that it was just too easy for him to get by speaking German in Prague, especially with Ana, and in times like these he regretted that it had been so easy. He especially regretted it now, as the last thing he wanted was for Klaus to have to translate for him.

"I can speak German," Mr. Hrabal insisted, before pointing to the street below. He did this over the sound of a small dog barking in the adjoining room, and he told them: "He was sitting right there, the Nazi officer, up against the shrubs."

"You found him while you were walking your dog, is that right?" Hermann asked.

"That's right."

"Was this when you left the building or when you came back?"

"It, it was when I came back."

"Are you sure that he wasn't out there when you left?"

"I'm certain of it. I would have seen him right from the building's front door. And so would Pepin. That's my dog."

"Are you certain of the time, too?"

"I'm certain of it. I take Pepin out every night at ten, or within a few minutes of it. We go out right after the nightly news on the radio."

"Had you ever seen the dead man before?"

"Never."

"Are you certain about that? You never saw him even in passing?"

“Not even in passing.”

“Do you remember where you went that night?”

“Where I always go: around the block.”

“So, you walked . . .”

Using his hand and turning in something of a circle, the old man demonstrated the path he took while telling them: “Down Dušní, then around U Staré Školy and onto Věžeňská, before coming back up Dušní.”

It wasn’t difficult for Hermann to determine that the man’s path was a simple rectangle. He also quickly determined that its area consisted of no more than a few hundred square meters, and he said to him: “You didn’t hear anything along the way?”

“Like what?”

“A fight or a commotion. Some kind of disturbance.”

“I didn’t hear anything like that. Or anything at all really. But truthfully my hearing isn’t what it used to be.”

With no more questions to ask, the two men left Mr. Hrabal’s apartment, much to the disappointment of Mr. Hrabal, who clearly had been enjoying the company, and Klaus and Hermann returned down the steps to the street below.

“Maybe he just didn’t hear the murder take place,” Klaus said, right after Hermann told him that he didn’t think that the killing took place where the captain was found. “He did say that his hearing is bad.”

“He had no trouble hearing me,” Hermann countered, “and I wasn’t speaking loudly at all. The dog, too, would have alerted him. He barked the moment he heard my bad Czech.”

“So, you think Captain Gruber was killed where?”

“I have no idea,” Hermann told him, before walking up to the shrubbery and asking, “This is about where Gruber was found, right?”

“About,” Klaus answered.

Carefully, Hermann inspected the area around the bushes, and he saw that nothing seemed displaced or out of the ordinary. Nor were there any footprints on the ground or broken branches or any other indication that someone had walked through the area. So, he next looked a handful of steps behind the shrubs, at a cobblestone path that led to the synagogue entrance. There he noticed small, almost imperceptible cracks in the stones that led from the shrubs to the synagogue entrance, and he showed them to Klaus, who in turn started walking toward the building.

Chapter 15

Gertrude parked her pristine white Horch 930V Phaeton convertible on Smetana Quay. As she did, she looked like the cover image of a magazine promoting a rich and carefree lifestyle. She had on her face the same smile that had been there ever since meeting Hermann, and it seemed as if there were not a thought going on in her pretty little head.

But this didn't last for long, because in the distance she heard something that sounded like a gunshot echoing in the distance, and this wiped the smile right off her face. It also caused her to grip the steering wheel. She gripped it tightly while recalling something that she really did not want to recall.

In this recollection, the gunshot echoed throughout the villa. It echoed, too, in her head, and this caused her to jump off her bed and burst out of the bedroom and down the hall. Because of the waxed wood floors there, she almost slipped multiple times. She also could further hear footsteps in pursuit of her, and the heavy breathing that accompanied them. Though she tried to ignore all this, and she flew down the stairs, which were also

made of wood and heavily waxed as well, making each step perilous.

It didn't take long before she made it to the bottom of the staircase and to the hallway, which she did while avoiding the stone-faced man in a wrinkled suit who was charging toward her from the living room. With him now chasing her, she scurried into the living room herself, and from there she headed toward the study.

"Herr Frank!" the stone-faced man called out from just behind her, toward someone in the study. "I can't stop her!"

Just as he said this, Gertrude threw open the study door, and she flew inside the room, where with the rising morning sun she saw a sight that she would never be able to unsee. She saw the remains of what had been her life lying on the floor.

Not wanting to see this anymore, Gertrude forced her hands to release the wheel and she forced the smile right back on her pretty face. She did this in defiance of herself, and she jumped out of her car before racing across the street to the riverbank, where she looked northward. She gazed not just at the docks and at the boats floating upstream but also at a something that she could only see in her mind. Something that was tugging her forward.

Resisting this, she turned in the opposite direction, and she began waltzing down the riverbank. She did this as if she owned the whole damn city and while chugging in the cool air that was blowing off the roaring water beside her. She also pretended. She pretended that she really was a happy and carefree woman and that she could control her emotions and all the hate that was flowing out of them, and not let them control her.

Though she was unable to maintain her pretending for long, and the reason for this had nothing to do with anything directly relating to her. It was because she soon

came upon a bench where sat a woman that she knew all-too-well. This woman was wearing a paisley shawl over both her head and shoulders and was a little older than Gertrude, and she was both unkempt and filthy. She was also smaller than Gertrude, with dark black hair and eyes of the same color. With the latter, she was staring into the river without any signs of life. They barely even blinked.

In spite of the obvious differences between the two women, Gertrude saw in her someone familiar. Too familiar. It was actually like looking into a mirror that reflected time. It reflected that horrible morning many years earlier and made her doubt whether she really could control the feelings that were always looking for a reason to explode.

That she was once like this woman wasn't something that Gertrude just noticed that morning. She noticed it whenever she ran into the woman, which happened far more often than what any standard deviation of coincidence could allow. Their meeting happened so often that Gertrude couldn't help think that their fates were somehow intertwined.

But as she approached the woman that morning, Gertrude wanted to walk right past her. She wanted to do so with the barest acknowledgement, because she had important things to do that day and didn't want anything to distract her from completing them. But she just couldn't quite convince herself to do this, and she instead strode up to the woman and stopped.

"How are you this morning, Klara?" she asked, though she knew from experience that she wasn't likely to get an answer.

As expected, the woman did not respond.

"Did you sleep well?" Gertrude went on. "Or at all?"

Again, the woman didn't say a thing or react.

"What happened to the blanket I gave you?" was the next question she didn't expect an answer to, and she gently took hold of the woman's shoulders and murmured, "What am I going to do with you?"

This time Klara at least looked at Gertrude, who could see just a little spark of hope in Klara's eyes, or at least the wanting to have such a hope. This led Gertrude to tell her: "My offer from yesterday still holds. You could think of it as a favor to me. Which would be true. You have no idea how true it would be."

While Klara didn't exactly reply to this, Gertrude could see at least some mild acquiescence in her eyes, and jumping at this, she pointed to the building across the street and said, "There's someone I need to speak with for just a few minutes inside the café, but right afterward I'm coming back for you. Will you promise me that you'll wait?"

Klara didn't answer, but the look in her eyes remained the same, and Gertrude took this for a yes.

Quickly, Gertrude began backing her way across the street, and she rushed inside Café Slavia. She did so while pretending once more that she was in complete control of herself.

Right away, just as she passed through the door of the building, she saw someone. She saw a tall and well-built balding man a little older than her, who was sitting at a table in the middle of what was a narrow and long hall. He saw her at the same time, and he rose to his feet and smiled as she strutted toward him with the same exact smile she had flashed in front of Hermann, and they kissed each other's cheeks with lots of affection before sitting across from each other.

“I’d order you a cup of coffee,” he said to her while lifting his own, with a voice that seemed to come from a man much smaller than him, “but it took a half-an-hour to get mine, and I’m a regular here.”

“Why do you keep coming back to this place?” she growled. “The service here has always been terrible. It’ll be terrible a hundred years from now.”

“I love the view,” he said, while nodding toward the riverbank to his right. “I honestly don’t know what I’d do without it. Even the idea of this frightens me.”

Seemingly ignoring these statements, Gertrude smirked a bit and said to him: “Tonda, you’ve been a very naughty boy.”

“Whatever do you mean?” he asked, while feigning innocence.

“I haven’t seen or heard from you in weeks, and you know how I don’t like that.”

“It couldn’t be avoided, my dear. It’s been a hectic few weeks. There is lots of craziness going on in Josefov right now. All over the place there. My duties have me coming and going at all hours of the night. I’ve barely slept since the last time we met.”

“So, business is good, I presume.”

“Better than good, and it’s only going to get better. Early next week, in fact.”

“Is this that big deal you’ve been alluding to me for so long?”

“It indeed is, my dear, and it’s all but complete. Me and my associate just need to pick up the goods.”

“Associate? What ‘associate’ is this?”

“Luděk.”

“You’ve never mentioned such a man before. Who is he?”

“A man I’ve worked with for years. I even knew his father a bit. The salt of the

earth, as they say. With just a dash of pepper thrown in.”

“I sure hope you can trust him.”

“I can. I’m telling you, my dear, that it is all downhill from here. The hard part is over.”

“See, and you were worried that the deal would fall through.”

“You were right, my dear. Just like you always are. There was not even the slightest hitch.”

“You sound surprised.”

“Not surprised. Astonished. Frankly, I was certain that this deal would be the death of me. I even made out my will.”

“Don’t talk like that. I’ve got enough to worry about.”

“Like what?”

“Like Klaus. He’s been acting awfully strange of late, and it’s making me awfully suspicious.”

“You don’t think that he’s up to something unkosher, so to speak?”

“I don’t know what he’s up to. The man’s impenetrable. But speaking of unkosher, I just saw something terribly odd earlier this morning, to say the least.”

“Saw what?”

Carefully, Gertrude looked around the almost empty café before leaning toward Tonda and whispering, “I saw him earlier this morning with a Jew.”

“A Jew?” Tonda whispered back, with lots of shock. “There are still Jews left in Prague?”

“Apparently,” she said with a grin. “He looked like he had just come from one of

the camps. But what was even stranger was that the two of them appeared almost congenial. They were about to take a car ride together, like it was the most normal of things. Someone might have even thought that they were colleagues or something.”

“Do you think this Jew is some kind of a collaborator?”

“I don’t know. But I’m going to find out. Trust me.”

“Maybe I should delay my deal, you know, just in case you have a problem of some sort that you need help with. Another week probably won’t make a difference.”

“But it could. You’ve been working on this deal so long, Tonda. I’d hate to see it fall apart at the end. It would pain me greatly. If anything, you should probably hasten the deal.”

“Hasten it? By how much?”

“By how much can you hasten it?”

“I could even get it done today if necessary. Or tomorrow at the latest. Believe me, my partners would love nothing more than to hasten it. They seem quite anxious to get the deal done.”

“It seems to me then that you have nothing to lose by hastening it,” she told him.

“Only a little something,” he told her back with a smile, while patting his jacket pocket. “And I have my will with me at all times.”

Chapter 16

Klaus and Hermann cautiously stepped inside the vestibule of the Spanish Synagogue, which was the newest synagogue in Josefov, having been constructed not even a century earlier, on the grounds of what had been the oldest synagogue in the city.

It was the first time in many years that Hermann had been in a synagogue or in any kind of house of worship, apart from some very makeshift ones in recent times, and because of this he tried to feel something. He tried to feel even the slightest pangs of faith or meaning in his surroundings. But no matter how hard he tried, it was just a beautiful but ordinary building to him. He couldn't feel a thing, and this lack of feeling was both discomfiting and discouraging.

The synagogue was empty, but it was also well lit, and the lights surprised them a little. But what surprised them a lot was when they heard a meek but friendly male voice call out from not far away, "Who's there?"

"Hello," Klaus called back. "We . . ."

Klaus couldn't finish his thought. He couldn't because a man about his age came

limping into his view. This man was a little taller and a little heavier than average, and he had a cherubic face. He also was awkwardly wearing a plain black cloth kippah, on the front of his head instead of in the back as it was normally worn, and he had on grimy blue work dungarees and a pair of well-padded slippers. But in spite of the latter, every step he took brought him intense pain, which his face couldn't hide. He would wince whenever his heel hit the floor, and he looked as if the imbalance caused by his movements could lead him to fall over at any time and for the slightest of reasons. Though Hermann and Klaus quickly discovered that the man's feet were the least of his disabilities.

As soon as the man saw Hermann, a big happy smile came across his face, as if he were witnessing a long-lost brother. This joy led him to stagger toward Hermann as fast as he could, and after handing him a kippah much like his from his coat pocket, he shook Hermann's hand. He shook it hard and over and over, and he cried out, "You've come back."

"Back?" Hermann uttered, with lots of confusion, after the man finally released his hand.

"You Jews — you've come back to Prague."

Hermann now realized the source of the man's confusion. Despite his obvious mental limitations, even he could tell Hermann's ethnicity. "I'm afraid it's just me who's returned," Hermann softly told the man, as he put on the kippah, and this news caused the man's face to express intense disappointment, which only became more accentuated when he glanced at Klaus.

"Do you work here?" Hermann asked.

"I'm Ivo," the man answered, with his disappointment having vanished at once

and his smile having returned. “I’m the caretaker of the synagogues.” He said this and started counting with his fingers, right before adding, “All six of them.”

“Ivo what?”

“Ivo Pokorný.”

“You take care of all the synagogues by yourself?” Hermann asked next, and the man nodded his head over and over with lots of pride. He also told Hermann: “Before, before I worked just at the Maisel, for Rabbi Popper and his wife. That’s the pretty building down on Maiselova Street. But now, now even six is too little work for me.”

Hermann nodded at this, and he asked the man another question: “What time do you work until?”

Ivo had to think about this for a few moments before using his fingers to signify clock hands.

“Until five?” Hermann uttered, and Ivo again nodded his head over and over and with a big smile, and Hermann added: “Does someone work here after you leave, like a night watchman?”

“No one. I lock each synagogue right after I clean them. That’s what Rabbi Popper told me to do right before he and his wife left. Have, have I done something wrong?”

“Why would you say that?”

He responded by pointing to Klaus and saying, “You’ve brought a policeman.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Hermann told him. “I promise you. Do you mind if we look around the synagogue a little?”

“This is your house. I’m just taking care of it until all of you come home. Call out

if you need me.”

He said this and started off, again with lots of pain.

“What’s wrong with your feet?” Hermann asked, and Ivo stopped and turned back to him, and he said, “My feet are very bad, and there is no more Dr. Brod here to help me.”

“Were you in some kind of accident?”

“My feet have always been this bad. Since I was born, I think. I don’t remember that far back. Anyway, that’s why I couldn’t fight in the big war. I wanted to.” To emphasize this last point, he pretended to fire a machine gun.

“We could’ve used a man like you,” Hermann told him with a warm smile, and this made the man happy. He grinned and kept grinning even as he limped off in incredible pain.

“Just one more question,” Hermann said, and again Ivo stopped and turned to Hermann, who asked, “Who pays you?”

“Pays me?” Ivo asked back.

“You get a salary, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes. Mr. Malý comes at the end of every month and pays me my salary, and then I pay my landlady Mrs. Mlýnková right away, just like the Rabbi always told me to do.”

“Do you know Mr. Malý’s first name?”

“No, but he’s a very nice man. He’s always smiling. He smiles even more than Rabbi Popper did, and he smiled a lot.”

“How long have you known Mr. Malý?”

“Ever since Rabbi Popper left. He came to the Maisel a few days afterward and told me that he would pay me every month until Mr. Popper returned. He also told me that he would get me anything I would need.”

“Did he give you his phone number?”

“I have it in the Maisel. Mr. Malý pinned it on a board in the office so that I wouldn’t lose it. Do you want me to get it?”

“What time do you usually clean the Maisel?”

“The first thing in the morning.”

“At 9:00?” Hermann asked, and he made clock hands with his fingers to make this clear.

Ivo nodded.

“We’ll come by then if we need it,” Hermann told him.

Again, Ivo nodded, and with Hermann having run out of questions for the man, he let him continue his work. At the same time, Hermann — while ignoring the large and ornate prayer hall for the time being — searched through the periphery of the building with Klaus. He glanced into every room and closet they passed, no matter how small or insignificant it seemed, many of which contained nothing but furniture collected from other synagogues, which was also packed inside the prayer hall.

“You think Gruber was killed somewhere here?” Klaus asked.

“I’d say it’s a strong possibility,” Hermann told him. “What if all three men were killed in synagogues and carried outside of them and set down? It would explain why all three were found in similar positions.”

“But what would SS officers be doing in synagogues, especially long closed

ones?”

“That’s a very good question,” Hermann said, as he stopped and peeked into yet another room. “If we can come up with an answer to that, we’ll probably have a good idea as to what happened.”

“What exactly are you looking for?” Klaus asked next, while peeking over Hermann’s shoulder.

“If I knew exactly,” Hermann answered, “I wouldn’t have to look for it.”

But not finding it in this particular room, Hermann now entered the prayer hall, and he stopped in the entranceway along with Klaus while admiring the arabesque ceiling and the balconies of each side of the hall.

“Stunning,” he mumbled.

“Yes,” Klaus admitted, “it is indeed beautiful.”

“Sometimes it is hard to believe that human beings are capable of such beauty.”

Slowly, the two men began walking through the hall. Hermann found the silence there eerie, having never been in such a place that was so quiet, and this eeriness only continued when he climbed the four steps leading to the altar and reached the ark at the end of it, which was slightly ajar. He further opened the ark, and with a bit of surprise he found it empty.

“What did you do with the Torah?” he asked Klaus.

“The what?” Klaus asked back.

“It’s a large Hebrew scroll containing the Five Books of Moses.”

“You mean the Pentateuch?”

“We Jews know the books by the name of the man who wrote them. Actually, in

the cheder I attended as a boy, I was taught that God spoke the words and Moses wrote them down with his tears. You know, I always thought that was pretty, even if I never really believed it. Anyway, the Torah is the most important item in any synagogue and it's kept right here in this ark. Did one of your people confiscate it when they closed the synagogue?"

"I have no idea. I wouldn't even know who to ask about it. Do you think it has something to do with Gruber's death?"

"No. I was just curious as to what happened to it. That's all."

With that, the two men left the prayer hall, and they continued searching the building. They did this until they found a small room that contained a library of sorts. This interested Hermann for some reason he did not know, and he stepped inside it followed by Klaus, and he gazed at one of the handful of bookshelves there, which included mostly dry Hebrew-language religious texts.

Again, Hermann tried to feel something, because of being around these books. He wasn't expecting faith itself, but at least the feeling that the books had some special meaning to him or that he had some small connection to them. But they were just books to him, much like they had always been.

"I'm sorry," Klaus murmured, while watching Hermann and shaking his head, "but I just don't see how any of these books could've had something to do with Captain Gruber's murder."

"In my experience," Hermann told him, "it's often an item that appears completely unrelated to a crime that somehow exposes it or leads to its exposure. To do this job effectively, Klaus, you have to separate what your eyes take interest in from what

your mind tells you makes sense.”

Hermann kept looking at the books, and he soon came upon the next bookshelf, where he saw a book his eyes found particularly interesting: *Sefer Yetzirah*. They found it interesting for a couple of reasons. The first reason was that the book’s content was far different from all the traditional rabbinical texts surrounding it. It was a book that he hadn’t even thought about since his childhood, and this led him to recall how his father had more than once told him about it in the midst of one of his fantastical tales. But the second reason that his eyes found the book so interesting had nothing to do with the content of the book, and this caused him to both pull it off the shelf and check its edges.

“Now what are you doing?” demanded Klaus, with a bit of frustration.

“How long has this synagogue been closed?” Hermann asked him.

“More than a year.”

“So, why does this book have clean edges?”

“Maybe the caretaker cleaned it.”

Hermann responded to this by moving his finger along the top edge of the neighboring book, and he showed Klaus the resulting dust, and he said to him: “Then, why do the rest of the books here and those on the other shelves in this room have dust along their edges?”

Klaus didn’t reply, and Hermann opened the book and started flipping through its pages, even though his Hebrew was even worse than his Czech.

“What is it?” Klaus asked.

“The title translates to *The Book of Creation*,” Hermann told him “It’s what’s called Kabbalah. Jewish mysticism.”

“And what could it possibly have to do with Gruber’s murder?”

“That I don’t know. All I can tell you is that this book doesn’t seem to belong here. Not in this library, nor anywhere in this synagogue, and that’s what makes it so interesting to me.”

But the book offered no further clues to Hermann, so he closed it and returned it to its shelf, and he and Klaus left the library and continued looking around. They did this until they reached the back of the building, where they found an old arched doorway made of thick wood. It was locked, so they quickly found Ivo, who told the two that he didn’t have the key for it. Though he was so nervous about their inquiry that Hermann couldn’t help become suspicious of why.

“Who has the key?” Hermann asked.

“Rabbi Schuler,” Ivo mumbled. “He was the rabbi of this synagogue before, before he left.”

“What’s behind the door?”

Ivo didn’t exactly reply. Instead, after glancing at Klaus, he shrugged, which made him appear even more suspicious.

“I’ll get someone to open it,” Klaus interjected. “In the meantime, we can go to the third scene.”

Hermann nodded, and he said to Ivo: “How can we reach you if we need to speak to you?”

“Just call out,” Ivo said back.

“I mean, how do we find you if you are not at work?”

“Oh, I live on Maiselova Street, in one of Mrs. Mlýnková’s rooms above the café

across from Jáchymova Street. I live in the room right on top of the first staircase.”

Hermann nodded at this with a knowing smile, while once again recalling the café and all the time he had spent there with Ana, and after returning the kippah to Ivo, he and Klaus left the synagogue and returned through the courtyard toward the car, with Hermann’s mind trying to unwrap the mystery of Ivo.

Noticing his puzzlement, Klaus asked him what was wrong.

“He’s hiding something,” Hermann said, while nodding back toward the synagogue.

“The caretaker? Surely, you don’t think that he could have had something to do with all this.”

“Why couldn’t he?”

“First, he’s a complete idiot. He’s barely conscious of the basest of realities. Second, he’s lame. Frau Schiller was not exaggerating about her husband. He was indeed a strong man and well versed in hand-to-hand combat techniques. He would’ve pulverized that idiot even if the man had caught him by surprise, which is very unlikely. The other men, too, were quite capable and well-trained soldiers. I doubt Ivo could have even carried any of those men.”

“You asked me whether I thought he had something to do with this, not whether I thought he was the one who actually committed the murders. The former, I think, is quite possible, if not likely. The bigger question is whether he even knows he’s had something to do with it.”

Chapter 17

Getting to the Klausen Synagogue required an even more circuitous route than Hermann and Klaus's previous journeys through the maze, despite it being no more than a couple of kilometers from the Spanish Synagogue. They had to drive all the way north to the river and from there go westward around Dvořák Quay before taking a seashell-like path through Maiselova Street and U Starého Hřbitova. All this meant traveling many times the actual distance between the buildings.

"I don't understand how you can figure this all out," the driver mumbled to Hermann with lots of frustration, as he parked near the building with his head shaking in a continuous motion.

"It comes from getting lost so much over the years," Hermann told him. "Eventually, you come to see that making your way through Josefov is like solving a puzzle, which consists simply of finding a path between two points. The reason that I say that this is simple is that the number of these puzzles are not as infinite as you may think. They are roughly limited to the number of streets in the district squared, and there really

aren't that many streets here at all, even when you take into account all the streets that change directions, like Široká yesterday. So, eventually, you discover that finding your way from any point in Josefov to another is only a matter of recalling one of these puzzles you've already previously solved."

The driver made no response to this, and Klaus and Hermann stepped out of the car, and right away Hermann nodded toward one of the many stands that were lined against the nearby cemetery wall. This particular one was a food stand selling greasy kielbasas.

Grudgingly, Klaus acceded to Hermann's request, and he bought Hermann an overcooked sausage, which came on a piece of thick paper, along with mustard and a few slices of stale rye bread. He also bought Hermann a beer that was even weaker than the one he had the day before, so that he could wash it all down.

"Your diet hasn't gotten any better since college," he told Hermann, while watching him eat with a slight grimace. Both the sights and the smells rising from the paper literally made him want to wretch. "Nor has it gotten any more Jewish."

"But my diet has gotten a lot better since Theresienstadt," Hermann told Klaus back, while again feeling angry that his stomach wouldn't fully allow him to enjoy what he was eating. "I thank you for that much."

Klaus made no reply to this, and Hermann asked, "You're not eating anything?"

"I had a big breakfast," Klaus lied, with an even bigger grimace. Despite this lie, though, he wasn't the least bit hungry. The nightmares had long taken away his appetite, and he often had to force himself to eat at times, much as Hermann was doing right at this moment.

“Back before the occupation,” Hermann went on, before lifting the sausage, “almost every morning I had one of these as *svačina*.” The light meal that many in Prague ate between breakfast and lunch was actually just one of the many times he indulged in the food, and he looked with fondness upon all of them. “They’re awful,” he added, “but they’re a wonderful kind of awful.”

Hurriedly, Hermann finished as much of the meal as he could, and the two men stepped inside the synagogue and into a large and ornate prayer hall that had exceedingly high vaulted ceilings. Hermann noticed not only this but also the tall chandelier that extended from the ceiling all the way to the balcony, which itself extended halfway around the room. He further noticed that not far from the chandelier stood a short and heavysset female SS officer around forty, who was directing a pair of workers in placing oversized photographs of people on the four walls of the hall, which were labeled “Jews,” “Gypsies,” “Homosexuals,” and “The Disabled.”

“Don’t put it on that wall, you fool!” she screamed at one of the men, who was hanging a picture on the wall labeled “Homosexuals.” “Can you not see the man’s hooked nose? Whether or not he was a homosexual as well is of secondary concern.”

“That must be Lieutenant Krieg,” Klaus whispered to Herman, before they strode up to the woman. Hermann did so without a lot of enthusiasm, knowing that he was unlikely to have a pleasant encounter.

After introducing both himself and Hermann to the woman, Klaus told her that they were interested in the circumstances of Major Fischer’s death. He told her this while being careful not to mention any of the other men’s deaths.

“What’s going on in here?” Hermann asked, while looking around the hall with

lots of confusion.

The woman didn't respond, and eventually Klaus sighed and said to her: "The man asked you a question."

"I don't answer the questions of Jews," she snarled.

"You will answer this one's, lieutenant," Klaus snarled back.

Now, it was the lieutenant's turn to sigh, and while watching the worker now hang the picture on the wall labeled "Jews," she told Hermann: "We are turning this building and all the other synagogues in this district into museums, and this will be one of its main expositions."

"An exposition of what?" Hermann asked.

"Of extinct peoples."

"None of these people are extinct."

"The exposition hasn't opened yet," she growled, between her clenched teeth. "It will take years for it to be fully completed. But hopefully not that many."

"And what will be the point of these museums?"

"To chronicle your race and other similar forms of existence. You should be thankful that the Reich is taking such trouble and expense to keep the memory of your people alive."

Hermann wasn't particularly thankful, but he wasn't too angered, either. He wanted to feel anger, at not just at what she had said but also at how she had defiled what was once a holy place. But he could feel no more anger toward her than he could find joy in being in a synagogue. He could only feel unease, and mostly at himself.

"Are you developing these museums in cooperation with Mr. Malý?" Hermann

now asked, while trying to ignore this unease.

“Who is Mr. Malý?” she asked back.

“The man who is responsible for the synagogues.”

“What do you mean by ‘responsible’?”

“He’s responsible for the buildings.”

“Such things are none of my concern. Colonel Reidl’s office deals with issues related to the buildings themselves. My responsibilities only involve curation.”

“You’re the person who discovered the body of Major Fischer, is that right?”

Klaus asked.

“He was sitting out there by the front door when I came in the morning,” she told Klaus, right after turning toward him.

“Did you know him?” Hermann asked, while trying hard to avoid looking at any of the pictures on the wall or at Lieutenant Krieg directly.

“He had been observing the progress of the exposition,” she answered.

“He said that was his purpose?” questioned Klaus.

“Not exactly,” she said. “But why else would he be here all the time? There is great interest in this exposition. I hear even Himmler is interested in our work.”

“Was the major ever here at night?” was Hermann’s next question.

“I don’t know how late he stayed at night,” she told him, “but lately he was often here when I left. Including the day he died.”

“What time did you leave that day?”

“At exactly 4:30.”

“Was anyone else here with him when you left?”

“Just the idiot.”

“The idiot?”

“The crippled idiot who sometimes works here.”

“You mean Ivo.”

“I didn’t even know he has a name. We just call him ‘idiot.’ One day hopefully his picture will be up on that wall over there, along with others of his kind.”

“I have just one more question: what was the major doing when you left that day?”

The woman responded by pointing to a far back corner of the prayer hall and saying, “He was very interested in that door over there.”

Both Klaus and Hermann looked in the direction of her finger, and they saw an old and arched wooden door. A door just like the one in the Spanish Synagogue.

“What’s behind it?” Hermann asked, while glancing at Klaus, who was glancing right back at him.

“It leads to a cellar,” the woman said.

“Can we go down there?”

“The door’s locked and no one has a key. Major Fischer even had a locksmith here. But not even he could open it. Nobody can.”

“Then, how do you know that it leads to a cellar?”

“The major asked me about it as well. So, I did a little research and found a blueprint of the building.”

Neither Klaus nor Hermann had any further questions, so, without even saying goodbye to the lieutenant, they started to leave. Though Hermann quickly stopped when

he noticed the ark by the altar in the front of the hall and noticed that it was empty.

“Just one more question,” he said to the lieutenant, after turning toward her.

“You said that before,” she growled.

“But this time I mean it. What have you done with the Torah that was in that ark?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“A large Hebrew scroll, likely plated in gold, that was in that compartment in the front of the room.”

“That compartment has been empty ever since I started working here.”

“And when was that?”

“Six months ago.”

Hermann nodded, and the two men left the synagogue, with Hermann feeling once again thankful. This time he was thankful for breathing fresh air.

“I guess you were right about Ivo,” Klaus said to Hermann, as they made their way back to the car. “I’ll have someone pick him up.”

“We have no evidence against him,” Hermann insisted, knowing full well what would likely await Ivo if someone did “pick him up.”

“We know that he was with the dead man the night he died, and we know that he was in the vicinity of the other dead men as well. We also know that he was acting suspicious about the door. We’ll discover his connection to all this in short order.”

“If you don’t kill him first. Besides, you said yourself that he’s conscious of only the basest of realities.”

“Do you have a better suggestion?”

“Yes. We can get into those cellars. If the evidence leads to Ivo, we’ll find it soon enough.”

“Fine. We’ll get into those cellars.”

“How do you plan on doing that?”

“Trust me, Hermann, if the Reich can get into this country, it can get into two lousy cellars.”

The two at this moment came to a stop by the car, and Klaus opened the passenger-side back door. He also looked at his watch and said, “I have a meeting right now that I must unfortunately attend. I’ll take you back to the palace and get you some new guards, and they can take you to U Bilého Lva when it’s time for dinner.”

Hermann nodded, and Klaus added, “One more thing: I care deeply for Frau Gross, but she is truly the biggest gossip in town. She is not to know anything about what we are doing, other than that you are assisting me in a rather mundane and uninteresting crime investigation.”

“You think she’ll believe that?”

“Convince her. We both know that you have a way with women.”

Chapter 18

Klaus sat at the far end of a long table in Colonel Reidl's corner office. He sat there with a half-dozen other SS officers and listened to Captain Weber drone on about nothing in particular. He couldn't even focus on what the man was droning on about, and he felt his eyes becoming heavier and heavier.

They soon closed, and he felt sleep begin to overtake him. Though the fear of this shook him awake, and to stay that way he tuned out the captain and instead focused on the bold lines of the Loreta outside the colonel's window.

What ensued was a struggle of wills. The struggle between Weber's determination to continue talking gibberish and Klaus's determination not to listen to it. While this continued on, Klaus tried to sort out something that he didn't realize he would have to sort out until that day: his conflicting feelings about Hermann. On one hand, he hated the man. He hated him for many reasons, and he knew that at least some of these reasons were justified, or at least partially justified. At the same time, he couldn't deny that the past day spent with him had made him happy, happier than he had been in a long time.

He almost felt his old self returning, and he almost liked this self.

Still, he knew that both sets of feelings were dangerous. He knew that either one could alter the trajectory of the investigation in unpredictable ways. So, he knew that he needed to suppress both sets of feelings. Though he also knew that it was far easier to say this than actually do it.

But even harder still would be making it through the meeting.

Chapter 19

When Hermann returned to the palace, Marta was gone, and having nothing to do in his cramped office other than to stare at the same police reports over and over, he convinced his new guards to take him early to the restaurant, which was just a short distance away on Bělohorská Street. There he found himself sitting at a table in the center of the nearly empty restaurant with a beer in front of him and a lot more than an hour to kill.

This beer, though, was 12 degrees, meaning that it was about 5% alcohol and quite a bit stronger than the previous ones he had since his return, and after a pair of them he began drifting. He and his surroundings drifted back to a much happier time: to the evening he spent more than 20 years earlier with Ana and Klaus at U Zlatého Tygra.

“Na zdraví!” the three of them toasted in unison, as they raised the mugs of beer the waiter had just left them, which was just before they slammed these glasses into each other’s. They did this with so much force that Hermann thought for sure that they would all break.

But this didn't happen, and still being two beers behind his new friends, Hermann knew that he needed to work up a thirst. So, he started devouring the big plate of *utopence* that were lying in front of him.

"I don't know how you can eat that," Klaus said to him, while shaking his head and grimacing much as he would more than 20 years later when he watched Hermann eat.

"I don't know how, either," Hermann said to him back, before putting a big chunk of meat in his mouth and swallowing it after just a few bites. "Fortunately knowing has got nothing to do with it."

Ana giggled at this just a little, and as she did, her lips curled a bit. It was the first time Hermann had ever seen anything like it, though he wondered whether it was perhaps just the first time he had ever noticed such a thing. All he knew for sure was that he found both it and her fascinating. He found them so fascinating that he had a hard time concentrating on anything else.

"Do you have any idea how long those things have been sitting in that?" Klaus asked, while pointing to the big pickle jar by the bar, in which a number of small but plump sausages were floating in the brine. They looked like little "drowned men," which was what they were called in Czech. "They've probably been sitting there since before the war," Klaus added.

"They're like fine wine," Hermann insisted, though in truth this was only the second time he had ever eaten the dish, with the first coming a day earlier during the trip to Prague, at a long stopover late at night in Pardubice, well after he had run out of *lángos*. They were the only food the pub served and were cheap, and everything else in town was closed. He had no more choice in them becoming his favorite food than he had in Ana

becoming the object of his fascination.

“They’re hardly kosher,” Klaus quipped, while pointing at the meat.

“Neither am I,” Hermann stated, while glancing at Ana and wondering what she thought of him being Jewish, and whether it would affect her opinion of him.

“You couldn’t tell by looking at you,” Klaus added, and all Hermann could do in response was grin in embarrassment, as his Jewish looks were something that marked him wherever he went and something he couldn’t run from no matter how hard he tried.

“Just look at us,” Klaus went on, seemingly unaware of how uncomfortable he was making Hermann, “a German, a Jew, and a Czech together as one. Our own little triple entente.”

Both Ana and Hermann chuckled a little at Klaus’s reference to the nickname of their enemies in the recent war. Though Hermann also told him: “A joke like that could’ve gotten you shot in the war.” He meant it, too. He could even imagine more than one officer he had known during the conflict who would’ve done the shooting.

Hermann’s remark caused Klaus to notice an aging man at the end of their table, who was glaring at him with eyes full of hate, and he said to both his friends: “It might get me shot right now.”

“Don’t worry, Klaus,” Ana said back. “I’ll protect you.”

“But who’ll protect you?”

Ana responded by turning toward Hermann. She did so with a big smile and said, “The war hero.”

This comment embarrassed Hermann even more than Klaus’s kosher quip. It embarrassed him so much that he wanted to crawl underneath the table. Though at least

the sounds of war that the comment evoked were drowned out by all the pub noise.

“I read all about you in *Lidové Noviny*,” Ana continued. “The local boy who made good.”

“I’m not exactly a local boy,” Hermann told her, with even more embarrassment. “I’m actually from a little shtetl in Subcarpathian Rus that no one’s ever heard of. Not even people from other shtetls in Subcarpathian Rus.”

“I could’ve sworn that I read you were from Prague,” Ana retorted.

“My father and his family were from here, so when the reporter asked me where I was from, I . . .”

“You lied,” Klaus interjected.

“I lied,” Hermann muttered, while at the same time recalling his father and all the stories he had told him about Prague, which always seemed to be countless even though the man was a small boy when he left the city and couldn’t have truly remembered much. He also recalled the many nights that the two had spent in front of a fire talking of nothing but the city.

Whenever he listened to his father’s stories, Hermann’s eyes would always widen, as the city seemed so beyond anything his imagination could conceive, especially without having seen any pictures or photographs of the place to ground it in some kind of reality. He further could draw no parallels to it with anything he had actually seen or experienced in the fields and forests around his home, and this only drove his fascination of it further. There were times that he thought only of Prague. He thought of it when he was in school, he thought of it when he was doing his chores, and he even thought of it when he lay in bed at night. It was an obsession that was particularly pleasing to his father, who was

obsessed with the city himself, but not so much to his mother, who was obsessed with a much different city.

His mother's yearning for Jerusalem was something that he was aware of from the earliest of ages. She would not only talk about the city all the time, especially during the Sabbath and the High Holidays, but she would also sing about it, too. She did everything she could to impart her love for a city that she knew only in books onto Hermann, but it just never sparked his imagination the same way as his true love. Actually, it didn't spark it at all.

"It's always been my plan to move to Prague," Hermann said to Ana and Klaus, "to be from here, and to make something of myself here."

"I'm sure you will then," Ana told him, while looking deeply into his eyes, which again caused him to feel aspired by her. She made him want to believe in his own words, and she gave him the courage to believe in both them and in himself, and this made him want to somehow make her feel just as good as he was feeling at that moment. "Besides," she went on, "now that Subcarpathian Rus is part of Czechoslovakia, you're as much of a citizen here as anyone else. You have as much right to be from Prague as I do."

Hermann smiled at this, and he did so with lots of warmth. Though he also noticed that Klaus looked a bit uncomfortable. He was looking much like how Hermann felt just a few minutes earlier, so he decided to change the subject, to anything that wasn't about himself. "Where are you from?" he asked Ana.

"From right here in Vysočany," she said, referring to a district in the northeastern corner of the city. "We only recently became part of Prague, so I'm an adopted *Pražanka*, too."

“Are you going to the university, too?”

“I’m attending the Academy of Fine Arts.”

“You’re an artist?”

“She’s a painter,” interjected Klaus, with a bit of a sneer. “One of those nasty expressionists.”

“You mean like Max Beckmann?” Hermann uttered, with unrestrained excitement.

“You, you’ve heard of Max Beckmann?” she uttered back, with plenty of surprise, as she knew almost no one outside of school who knew of the man and his work.

“I saw some of his paintings at a gallery in Frankfurt when I was passing through there after finishing my military service. I had never seen anything like it, especially *The Night*. You know, before seeing that painting, I thought of art as something only to admire for its beauty. I never thought of it as something that could actually make you think and feel something. I, I must’ve stared at that painting for an hour. I thought that they were going to call the police on me.”

“He’s one of my biggest influences, especially that painting you just mentioned. And I can tell you that I’ve stared at it for a lot more than an hour. I mean, I’ve stared at the copy of it we have at school.”

“Really?”

“I would love to show you some of my work one day.”

“I would love to see it.”

“I should warn you, though, my paintings are not as good as Beckmann’s.”

“Even Beckmann must’ve been a student once. You must have great talent, or a school like the academy would’ve never accepted you. All you need is some more

training and experience, and maybe, I don't know, maybe someone to believe in you."

Ana smiled at both Hermann and his words, and she did so with as much warmth as he had been expressing toward her. From the moment Klaus had introduced them, she had felt attracted to Hermann, in spite of the significant difference in their height. He was not only handsome and charming, but she kept getting lost in his impossible brown curls, and more than once she had to stop herself from wrapping her fingers around them. But now, now her attraction to him was far more than physical.

Since the time Ana had reached adolescence, men had fawned over her and drowned her in compliments. But never once did these compliments go beyond her looks, and it never seemed that the men behind the compliments even cared to notice what was beyond them. Hermann, on the other hand, both noticed and cared, and she wondered if he could provide her with the one thing she knew that was lacking in her and holding her back: confidence in herself. Because of this, she found herself uncontrollably drifting toward Hermann, in more ways than one.

He noticed this, and it only made him more excited, but he also noticed that Klaus was looking even more uncomfortable than before. He seemed almost angry. Hermann supposed that this was from being excluded from the conversation. So, he turned to his new roommate and said, "And you? Where are you from?"

"Reichenberg," Klaus answered, which was a city all the way in the north of the country, in the Sudetenland.

"The city is called Liberec today," Ana insisted, with both elbows on the table and no shortage of congenial defiance.

"You can call it Xanadu if you want," Klaus insisted back, with his own defiance.

“To us it’s always been Reichenberg, and to us it will always be Reichenberg.”

It was now Hermann’s turn for insisting. He insisted, “Please, you two, let’s not start another war. I’ll never finish school.”

Again, Ana giggled, and again her lips curled a bit, and again the two looked deeply into each other’s eyes. Also again, Klaus looked both uncomfortable and perhaps even angry. To counter this, he chugged the remains of his nearly full beer and turned toward both the bar and the waiter standing in front of it. He further rose his empty mug high into the air and howled, “*Ještě jednou!*”

While Hermann saw and heard Klaus demand another beer, he was oblivious to it. He was oblivious to everything other than the woman who he saw even then was becoming his fate. Though he wasn’t so oblivious to the loud clearing of a throat, which brought him roaring back to U Bílého Lva and to his present situation.

Chapter 20

Hermann opened his eyes and turned toward the throat-clearing sound, and he saw Klaus and Gertrude standing beside his table, which caused him to jump a bit. It also caused him to rise to his feet to greet them.

“I do hope we didn’t keep you waiting,” Gertrude said to him, wearing a custom-designed blue evening gown that contrasted starkly with the shabby and ill-fitting suit he was wearing. Almost everything about her contrasted with him, apart from her height, which was roughly equal. Still, in spite of all their differences, he found something oddly familiar about her. Just as when they first met, he felt that there was something about her that went against the type she was projecting. Also, just like before, he didn’t know what this something was but knew that this only made her even more intriguing.

“I was here early,” he mumbled.

“I’m just glad you made it,” she said back, as she took a seat. She did this while finding him as interesting as he found her, if not more so, and she was eager to discover the source of this interest. “I’ve been so looking forward to this. You don’t know how

much.”

Hermann nodded, a bit unsurely, and he and Klaus joined her at the table. At the same time, the waiter came by with three menus, which he left in front of them before he continued on.

“They have terrific peppered venison here,” Gertrude remarked, without making the slightest attempt to look at her menu.

“I know,” Hermann muttered, while recalling the many times he had eaten the dish here over the years, and without thinking he added, “My wife and I . . .” There he stopped, while noticing Klaus glaring at him.

“Go on,” Gertrude said.

“Never mind,” Hermann told her. “It’s not important.”

“You two share some mysterious past, don’t you?”

“It’s not that mysterious, actually.”

“If only finding the truth in men were as easy as finding the area under a curve. I would simply take the definite integral between the two of you and discover everything I want to know. Still, I’m going to find out all about you two. You can trust me on that.”

But at this moment something else captured her interest: the waiter, who was walking past them, and she caught his attention by calling out, “*Pane vrchní!*”

Coming to a quick stop, the man turned around and stepped up to their table, and after fishing out his pad and pen,” he uttered, “*Ano?*”

“*Srnčí na pepři, prosím,*” she uttered back. “*Třikrát. S rýží.*”

“*Něco k pití?*”

“*Váš nejlepší pinot noir.*”

“Mléko pro mne,” Klaus interjected, with a bit of embarrassment.

“Dobře,” the waiter said to them, before taking the menus and rushing off to the kitchen.

“I hope you don’t mind that I ordered for you,” she said to Hermann.

“Not at all,” he answered, while unable to hide how shocked he was that she ordered dinner in Czech. It also embarrassed him a bit, knowing that he couldn’t have done it nearly as well.

“It annoys Klaus to no end,” she went on. “He’s not used to a strong woman.”

“Your Czech is really quite good,” Hermann told her. “Not even Klaus can pronounce his ř’s as well as you can, and I’ve always envied his. I still can’t say them right, which is something my wife . . .”

Again, Hermann stopped himself, while once again noticing that Klaus was glaring at him.

“I was born here, you know,” Gertrude continued, just as the waiter brought Klaus a glass of milk and Gertrude and Hermann a bottle of expensive French wine, which he showed her.

“Dobře,” she told him, and he uncorked the bottle and served it to them before leaving what remained on the table and taking his leave once again.

“I’ve known plenty of native German speakers that were born right here in Prague,” Hermann said to her, “and many can barely say hello in Czech, and most of these people aren’t the slightest bit ashamed of it, either.”

“Well, in my father’s house,” she said, “the entire staff was Czech. I simply had to learn it if I wanted to keep up with all the goings-on.”

“Something tells me that it’s more than just that, and I bet that something is a lot more interesting than my past with Klaus.”

Suddenly, the unrestrained gaiety that Hermann had witnessed in Gertrude from the moment he had met her emptied out of her. It was as if someone had deflated all the air in her balloon, and she mumbled, “My, my husband was a native Czech speaker. He insisted on us speaking it whenever possible.”

With the loss of air, sounds and images flooded Gertrude’s mind, not only of her tear-soaked visit only days earlier to Vyšehrad Cemetery, but also of the terrible morning years before that. The morning that she desperately wanted to forget, that she knew she had to forget. But no matter how hard she tried or what she tried, she couldn’t stem the flow of these images and sounds, and the horror of them poured out onto her face, which both Hermann and Klaus could see.

“I think we should change the subject,” Klaus interjected.

“Me, too,” Hermann said, while averting his eyes from both of them, as the horror he saw on her face was something he recognized all too well.

“Klaus tells me that you are a police detective,” Gertrude uttered, as she desperately tried to re-inflate herself. “He also says that you are helping him solve a very important case.”

“He said that?” Hermann asked, with lots of confusion.

“He actually said quite the opposite, which led me to my conclusion. Which you have just confirmed, by the way. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Hermann muttered, before glancing at Klaus, who just helplessly shrugged.

All this made Hermann see a certain truth about Gertrude. While earlier that day he had thought of her as both beautiful and interesting but vapid, he now knew that she was something a lot better. He knew that there was not only a human being behind the caricature she was projecting but that there was also a big powerful mind inside that pretty little head of hers, and that it was just as capable as anything on the outside of it, if not more so.

“I’ve actually never heard of a Jewish police detective before,” Gertrude went on. “I’ve heard of Jewish accountants and Jewish bankers, and lots of Jewish lawyers. But never a Jewish policeman.”

“There are more of us than most people probably think,” Hermann told her. “Police serve best in the communities in which they live, and Josefov, where I both lived and worked, was a community just like all others, with the same problems and crimes.”

“But there is no more Josefov.”

“There may not be any more Jews in Josefov, but there will always be a Josefov, and there will always be crimes there. Which, I suppose, is why I’m here right now.”

“So, I can assume that you haven’t been in Prague all this time.”

“Not all of it. I recently spent some time in Theresienstadt.”

While glancing at Klaus, Hermann could tell that he was starting to get antsy, and he only got antsier when Gertrude said, “It must be some crime for them to drag you out of Theresienstadt to solve it.”

“I suppose all crime is relative,” Hermann told her, “especially in times such as these. What may seem like a big crime to some people, to other people may seem small and insignificant in comparison to other crimes.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” she told him back, while feeling her interest in him turning up a few notches. She even found herself leaning toward him a bit. “So,” she added, “tell me: are you hot on the trail of this culprit?”

“I only began looking for him yesterday afternoon.”

“Something tells me that if I were your villain, I would be very worried about tomorrow morning.”

“Maybe the morning after tomorrow.”

Gertrude giggled at this, just as the waiter came by with three plates of peppered venison and white rice, which he placed in front of them before leaving once more.

“*Dobrou chut’*,” she called out to both of them, right after she picked up her utensils, and Klaus and Hermann replied in kind before picking up their own utensils.

Overwhelmed by the smells rising in front of him, Hermann quickly tore off a large piece of the thin meat, and he brought it into his mouth, where he savored every spice and flavor that came into contact with his tongue. The food made his entire body tremble. It trembled not just from the taste of it but also at the excitement of experiencing such pleasure again.

But this didn’t last long, as he was brought out of his delightful reverie when he heard a young man scream, “Heil Hitler!” from nearby.

He didn’t want to look. But he couldn’t help himself, and he glanced in the direction of the sound and saw an SS lieutenant saluting Klaus with his eyes as wide as apples.

“What is it?” Klaus asked, while looking perturbed, though not nearly as perturbed as Gertrude.

“Colonel Reidl requests your presence in his office at once on a most urgent matter,” the lieutenant answered.

Sighing, Klaus wiped his mouth with a napkin and rose to his feet, and he said to Gertrude: “I do hope you’ll forgive me.”

“You know I always do, darling,” she told him. “Though I shouldn’t.”

As for Hermann, he took one last and extraordinarily large bite of the venison, which was pretty much all he would’ve been able to eat that night anyway, and he washed it down with the entire glass of wine, which itself exhibited a perfectness that he never imagined wine having. He rose to his feet as well, and did so with great reluctance.

“But Hermann doesn’t have to go, does he?” Gertrude uttered. “I’ve been so enjoying our conversation.”

“I’m afraid so,” Klaus insisted. “This probably concerns him, too.”

“Then, tomorrow night, gentlemen. I’m having a dinner party at my home, and I won’t take no for an answer. I’ll even serve venison, Hermann, so you can get your proper fill of it this time.”

Chapter 21

Černín Palace was almost empty when the Mercedes parked in front of it. There was only a handful of offices in the entire block-long building that were still lit.

Without much enthusiasm, Klaus and Hermann stepped out of the car and shuffled inside the building, and once on the third floor they slowly made their way down the quiet and empty corridor that led toward one of these lit offices, with both men looking and feeling uneasy even if neither knew why.

“Do you want me to go in there with you?” Hermann asked, while pointing to the open door in their path.

“If he doesn’t want you there,” Klaus answered, “he won’t be bashful about it.”

No more than a few seconds after saying this, the two came to Colonel Reidl’s corner office, and Klaus marched inside the room and saluted the man, who was sitting at his desk alongside Captain Weber, with both of them laughing uproariously. While glancing at this, Hermann stopped at the edge of the doorway and tried to make himself as invisible as possible. Though this was futile.

“At ease, captain,” Reidl told Klaus, with just a bit of aggravation.

“You wanted to see me, sir,” Klaus told him back.

“Yes,” the man continued, as he sneered at Hermann just a bit. “I have some good news for you: the mystery of the murders has been solved. So, you can take the Miracle Jew back to where he belongs.”

Hermann knew that this news should have made him, if not exactly happy, then at least relieved, as it meant that he’d no longer have to participate in what he still believed was a farce. It should have done this in spite of him knowing that it was likely also much like a death sentence, or even because of it. But it didn’t do any of this. The news actually caused him to feel a strange unease that bordered on disappointment, whose source he wasn’t certain of. He told himself that it was probably brought on because he wouldn’t be able to continue working on a case that had unexpectedly intrigued him, but he knew that it was somehow more than this.

Klaus also had an unexpected reaction to the news, at least as far as Hermann was concerned. He looked both confused and upset.

“You found the killer?” he gasped.

“I didn’t,” Reidl answered. “Captain Weber did.”

“I told you,” Weber interjected with a big smirk, “that all it would take was a little persuasion on my part.”

“Who is it?” Klaus muttered. “Who’s the murderer?”

“Lieutenant Maier,” Weber answered.

“Hans Maier?”

“Yes.”

“He confessed?”

“More or less.”

“What does that mean?”

“He confessed that he directed Captain Schiller to the Maisel Synagogue on the night of the murder. We then searched his flat and found the belongings of all three dead men.”

“Strange,” Klaus muttered, while shaking his head.

“Why do you say that?” Reidl growled.

“Maier looks like he can barely carry his own weight, let alone other and much larger men.”

“What makes you think that he carried anyone?”

“We believe that the killer carried each man to where we found them.”

“You believe this, but you don’t know this as fact, am I right?”

“All the evidence so far suggests —”

“— Suggests is not the same as knowing.”

“Yes, but —”

“— But nothing, captain. And he could’ve had an accomplice, too. Which Captain Weber will discover in short order. The case is closed. You should be happy. Now, you can return to far more useful work. You want to be useful to the Reich, do you not?”

“Of course. Though I would still like permission to talk with Maier.”

“What for?”

“Just to be certain, and so that I can express this certainty in my final report.”

For many seconds, Reidl thought over Klaus’s request. He did so while looking as

if he were quite conflicted about it. But eventually he nodded his head and uttered, “All right. You can question him. He’s in Interrogation Room B. But if you cannot offer me proof of his innocence immediately afterward, this case is closed. Do we understand each other?”

Klaus responded by clicking his heels and saluting Reidl with great reverence.

“At ease,” Reidl insisted, while waving his arm dismissively at the man. “At ease.”

Klaus obeyed, and he started making his way toward both the door and Hermann. But Reidl stopped him. He stopped him by saying, “Just one more thing.” These words also caused Klaus to turn to the man, who added, “Regardless of what you discover, I don’t want to see that Jew again. Do we understand each other?”

Not only did Klaus understand, but so did Hermann, who knew that for the time being he had once again eluded fate. Though he also knew that it was coming back for more, and it was coming fast, looking to run him right over.

Chapter 22

Ivo sat in what passed as his kitchen in the tiny and dimly lit room that he called his home. He did this while finishing the enormous serving of potato dumplings he himself had prepared and while recalling the especially long day he had had.

Not only had there been the strange incident with the two equally strange men that morning in the Spanish Synagogue, but Lieutenant Krieg in the afternoon had been even crueler toward him than usual in the Klausen Synagogue. Though he took some solace that at least the other German was no longer haunting the place, especially at night. A man who was even crueler toward him than the lieutenant.

Dinner was good that evening, much as it had been for many years now. Though Ivo could still remember the times before that. The times when he rarely had a dinner, let alone a good one, and these recollections made him wish that the blessing was said after the meal instead of before it, as this was when he truly felt thankful.

In one big gulp, Ivo drank the nearly full glass of water that stood in front of him, and he brought his dish, his cup, and his utensils to the cracked and stained but tidy

ceramic sink that stood by the lone set of windows in his room. There he carefully washed and dried all his things before placing them on a clean towel beside the sink, next to the bowl and saucepan that he had used to make the dumplings, which he had washed right after making them. He did all this so that everything would be ready for the following night's supper.

Ivo further dried his hands on the towel, and he took out his coat from the closet and put it on, and he limped to and out his front door. There he found Mrs. Mlýnková sweeping the hallway, much as she usually did at that time of night, and he not only wished the aging woman a good evening but also asked her how she was doing.

"What a mess this place is," was her response, much as it often was whenever he asked her this question while she was cleaning at night. "I keep telling everyone to take off their shoes when they come into my house, but do they listen? Do they?"

"I listen."

"Only you, Ivo. I swear the next pair of shoes I find I will throw them right out the window!"

This was a threat that was also made nightly, but it still caused a look of horror to cross Ivo's face, and he both nodded gravely and started off.

"Out chasing the women again, Mr. Pokorný?" the woman asked, with a bit of a grin.

"Oh, no Mrs. Mlýnková," Ivo insisted, while shaking his head as emphatically as he could. "It's nothing like that. Honestly."

"Just be quiet when you return."

Again, Ivo nodded, doing so multiple times, and after he limped down the stairs

he put on his slippers by the front door and left the building. Right away, he could smell the faint odor of coal in the cool night air, which was something that had been getting fainter as the days had been becoming warmer. He could also sense that it was just about to rain, and he hoped that it wouldn't rain too hard.

Slowly, he limped his way north up Maiselova Street. But as he approached the Maisel Synagogue, he stopped. He stopped under an awning the moment he saw a woman wearing a paisley shawl approach the synagogue.

She was the same woman that he had often seen lurking by synagogues at night in the past month. A woman that had often fascinated him. On this night, though, she particularly fascinated him. This was because, unlike all the other times he had seen her, she was not filthy and disheveled. She looked even pretty, and she fascinated him so much that, without making the slightest movement toward her, he watched her walk around the synagogue.

Even after Klara had completely left his sight, Ivo continued looking at where she had been, as she was just as fascinating to him when she was gone as when she was in sight. He kept staring until he remembered that he had something to do that night, which is when he continued limping up the street.

To reach his destination that evening, he only had to walk a little more than a block further, but this still took him more than twenty minutes, especially as he had to stop more than once because his feet hurt so much. But he finally made it to the Old-New Synagogue, and he further made his way to the rear of the 13th-century building, where he pulled out an old wooden ladder that he himself had hidden behind a tree. This he placed underneath a set of metal rungs in the synagogue's back wall that rose from about

halfway up the building all the way to an attic door at the top.

Carefully, Ivo climbed both the ladder and the metal rungs, doing so one painfully slow step at a time. He did this even slower than how he had walked up Maiselova. But while his movements were slow, they were steady, too, and he had a look of determination on his face that never wavered in spite of all the agony it expressed. This was because he knew that what he would be doing later that night was far more important to him than any discomfort he felt at the moment.

Eventually, he reached the top rung of the building as well as the door to the attic, where Rabbi Issacs had told him before he left was the place for all things unholy. There he took out a set of rusty and large iron keys from his coat pocket, and with the largest one he opened the door and limped inside the room. He did this with a big smile on his face, which got much bigger when he looked inside and saw what was in the room waiting for him.

Chapter 23

Three men sat in a sparsely lit and uncomfortably small room with a short ceiling and a narrow width and depth. A few minutes earlier, when Hermann stepped through the door of it, the place reminded him of others. Those depicted in the claustrophobic nightmares of a number of Max Beckmann paintings Ana loved. In particular, the room reminded him of the one in Beckmann's *Family Picture*.

Before long, Klaus finished reading Captain Weber's hastily completed and sloppily written report, and he dropped the file onto the table, beside which sat not only he and Hermann but also a young man who was many stages past petrified.

Hermann had never met Lieutenant Maier before that night, but he knew him well. He also knew what the man was feeling. He had seen the same exact fear in other men over the years. Men who were victims of circumstances that were beyond what they could comprehend.

"Who ordered you to go and get Captain Schiller that night?" Klaus softly asked Maier, trying not to frighten him any more than he already was.

“I got a phone call from a Major Hoffmann,” Maier answered, while holding on to the table, which Hermann assumed was done in order to keep himself from shaking. “He said that he was from Legal Affairs and that it was urgent that I get Captain Schiller to the Maisel Synagogue at once, and that this order was for his ears alone.”

“Did you tell Captain Weber this?” Hermann asked.

“Of course,” Maier insisted, after turning toward him. “He said that there is no Major Hoffmann in Legal Affairs. He said that this further proves my guilt.” Quickly, the man spun back to Klaus and added, “But I’m not guilty. He really did call me, from a line inside the palace, and he asked for me by name. Why would I suspect that he wasn’t who he said he was?”

“Didn’t you find Major Hoffmann’s request strange?” Klaus uttered, with a shake of his head.

“Yes, but I’ve received stranger requests. Much stranger. It’s not unusual for people to leave cryptic or coded messages.”

“What about the belongings of the three men that they found in your flat?”

“I know nothing about them,” Maier screeched. “They were not there when I left this morning. Please, Captain, they’re threatening to shoot me for this.”

“How did you know where Captain Schiller was that night?” was Hermann’s next question.

“I got his home phone number from his file and called over there,” Maier answered. “A servant woman told me that he was at the Theater of the Estates with his wife.”

“Didn’t Captain Schiller find it strange that some major — a man he obviously

didn't know — wanted him to go to a synagogue in the middle of the night?"

"He didn't find it strange at all. When I gave him the order outside the theater, it was almost as if he were expecting it. He even snickered a bit when I told him."

"Did you accompany him to the synagogue or to anywhere else that night?"

"He told me outside the theater to go back to my post."

"But you knew that he was murdered that night, did you not?"

"No one said anything about a murder. I only heard that he was killed somehow. Soldiers get killed all the time. Why would I think that it had something to do with me?"

"Why didn't you inform your superiors about this incident?" Klaus demanded.

"Why didn't you report it in your log for that night?"

"Major Hoffman specifically ordered me not to put it in my report," Maier cried out, "and I certainly was not going to question a direct order from a superior."

Neither Klaus nor Hermann had a response to this or any more questions for the lieutenant, so they stood up and they started walking out of the room, leaving Maier even more frightened than how they had found him.

"Please," the man begged Klaus.

But there was nothing Klaus could do for him, and the two men left the room and Klaus closed the door, and after passing the two guards waiting outside it they slowly made their way out of the palace. They left it even slower than how they had entered it.

"He's innocent, you know," Hermann said to Klaus, though he wasn't sure why he bothered or why he even cared about the lieutenant, especially as he didn't even care about himself.

"I knew that even before I got here," Klaus said to him back. "But I can't prove

it.”

“They should have to prove his guilt, not the other way around.”

This was such an obvious assertion that Klaus didn’t even bother to reply to it. They just walked outside into the lightly falling rain without speaking another word to each other, and they got into the Mercedes and drove off.

“What are you going to do with me?” Hermann asked, even though he wasn’t certain that he wanted to know.

“Tomorrow I will take you back to Theresienstadt,” Klaus answered.

Hermann was skeptical of this, and he said to him: “But not tonight?”

“Not tonight. Mostly, mostly because I’m exhausted.”

Even if now lasts only five minutes more . . .

Once again, Hermann recalled the words Ana had once spoken to him. But this time he was sure that she had been right. He also knew that instead of just five minutes he would have a whole night, and that this could be made to last a long time.

Chapter 24

“He’s out there,” spoke Captain Weber’s hushed and frightened voice into the telephone receiver, as he stared into the darkness of the graveyard through a window.

“Who’s out there?” demanded Colonel Reidl on the other end of the line.

“The killer.”

“You’ve seen him?”

“I’ve heard him and his stomping feet. Just like I did the other night outside the High Synagogue.”

“Get a hold of your senses, man. You’re an SS officer, after all. Your cowardice has already gotten one man killed.”

“Would you have preferred that *I* had been the one who got killed at the Maisel?”

Reidl didn’t answer.

“Besides,” Weber went on, “it wasn’t cowardice. I truly wasn’t feeling well that night.”

Again, Reidl made no reply, and Weber leaned forward to get a better look

outside the window, which only frightened him more because he still couldn't see anything.

"Are you still on the line?" Reidl cried out.

"Yes," Weber answered. "I'm still here."

"Where are you calling me from?"

"The Pinkas Synagogue."

"I hope your call means that you have finally found it."

"Not exactly. I sent the men looking for it. Well, they're not exactly looking for it."

"Why aren't you with them? I told you to stay with them. Do you have the same death wish as Heydrich?"

"They are only a short distance away, colonel. I needed to call you."

"To tell me that you're frightened?"

"To tell you that it must be in this synagogue for sure. While we were making our rounds tonight, we saw Malý sneak inside the building."

"Malý? What would he be doing there?"

"He's double-crossing us, that's what he's doing."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because he was sneaking inside the synagogue in the middle of the night. I told you that we couldn't trust him. I've told you over and over that you can't trust Czechs, that they would sell out their grandmothers for a pair of pfennigs."

"Where is Malý now?"

"He's disappeared. But he's got to be in the building somewhere. That's what I've

got the men looking for. When we find him we'll find the —"

"— Never mind Malý. If it should come necessary, I have my own surprise planned for him."

"I'm telling you, colonel, it's in here. It must be. We can settle this whole thing tonight."

"All right. I'm coming over there right now. Just find those two idiots and stay put."

With that, Reidl hung up, and Weber put the receiver down and called out for the men. But there was no answer, not even when he called again and much louder. So, he went looking for them. He looked everywhere in the building. He even once more tried the arched wooden door that he was sure he saw Malý walk through when he and his men approached the windows outside the synagogue. But the door was still locked.

Fearing the worst about the two men who were supposed to be guarding him, Weber returned to the window and to the graveyard it exposed. For nearly a minute he stared into it, doing so while barely blinking. He stared even though all he could see was darkness. It was so dark that he only vaguely could see all the falling rain, which was now coming down hard. But it really didn't matter what the man's eyes could see. It only mattered what his mind could imagine, which was in excess.

Suddenly, lightning and thunder struck, and for the briefest of moments he saw a tall man scurrying through the hundreds of ancient and crooked gravestones. This caused Weber to jump and yelp just a bit.

Thinking that the man must be Malý, Weber again called out for his two guards, and when they again didn't answer, he got even more frightened. This caused him to slap

his black visor onto his head and to pick up his flashlight, both of which had been lying beside the telephone. He further unholstered his gun, which was something he had done so infrequently that he had trouble doing it, and he had even more trouble moving toward the front door. It took him nearly a minute before he finally stepped out of the back of the synagogue, where he stood facing the cemetery in the driving rain.

For many seconds, he just stood there, while thinking of how much he hated Prague rains. They seemed colder and stronger than all others he had known, even though he had grown up only a few hours away, and he wished that he were anywhere but there. He also wished that Reidl would hurry up and get there.

This led him to recall what the man had told him about being a coward, and he quickly straightened up. He also lifted his weapon and made his way into the graveyard, where he glanced around, everywhere at once.

He hadn't taken more than a few steps when he heard something. He heard the sound of footsteps in the distance, and he pointed both his shaking gun and the flashlight in the direction he thought the sound was coming from. "Is that you, Malý?" he called out.

There was no response, but as he panned the light across the yard, he saw a figure cut behind the synagogue, and he followed it. He followed it while shouting, "I will shoot you! I swear I will!"

It took only seconds before Weber reached the corner of the building, and he paused there while leaning against the wall, applying so much pressure to it that it looked as if he were holding it up. Finally, after not breathing for nearly a minute, he found a little courage. He found just enough to take a look, and he spun around the corner with his gun cocked and ready.

But there was nothing to shoot at. There was nothing at all apart from some footprints. Though these weren't ordinary footprints. They were the largest he had ever seen. They didn't even look like they were made by a human, and while running from them, he no longer cared what Colonel Reidl thought about him.

Chapter 25

Just as he did on his first night back in his old apartment, Hermann took a single step into the unit, and he did so with hesitancy. Though this time the hesitancy was driven by a sudden fear, which he felt just at this moment. He feared that he was somehow letting Ana down by not doing enough to survive, and he realized that this was likely the source of the strange unease he felt in Reidl's office.

Could he be doing something more to convince Reidl that Maier wasn't the killer? he asked himself. But he couldn't come up with an answer to this, and like the night before, he continued inside the apartment, and much like then, the guard closed the door behind him.

This caused him to stop, which is when he heard another sound: the sound of something slipping under the door. Turning toward it, he saw a folded slip of pink paper on the floor. The slip looked familiar to him. It looked so familiar that he rushed up to it and grabbed it and thrust it open, and he saw that it was the deportation order that he received the night before he left for Theresienstadt.

“What is it?” came Ana’s soft voice from nearby.

“Nothing,” he told her, as he turned to her and saw her sitting in her rocking chair in the living room, while once again staring at her paintings.

Sensing something in his voice, she turned to him as well, and she quickly looked far more afraid than how he felt. So, he crumpled the page. He crumpled it and added, “It’s just some stupid advertisement.”

Desperately, she tried to believe him. She did because the alternative was too unbearable. Her mind couldn’t even rationally process what it would mean for her.

Hermann saw all this, but he didn’t want to look at it. He couldn’t. Instead, he started making his way forward, with the paper clutched in his fist and a single thought piercing through his head: he wouldn’t tell her the truth. He convinced himself that it would be better for her if she didn’t know, even though he knew that it would only be better for himself.

Hurriedly, he rushed inside the bedroom, and he noticed right away that he no longer had any paper in his hand. He also noticed that he was back again in the present tense. His bare featherbed was again on the floor just as it was the night before, and the bare pillow was on top of it just like then as well, and like then he collapsed onto the bed and grabbed the pillow. He further closed his eyes and tried to will his mind to remember something else. Something that could bring him a little happiness that night.

But he had no control over his memory and what it caused him to relive. It once again sent him years earlier to the night he spent with Klaus and Ana. This time he was dragging a drunken Klaus toward the entrance of their dorm, with Ana walking a few steps behind them.

By this point of the evening, Hermann couldn't understand why Ana was still hanging around the two, as even he had become tired of them. He was especially tired of Klaus, who had been getting more ornery and unpleasant with each beer that passed through him. He was right now not only drunk but also singing. For a reason Hermann and Ana couldn't fathom, he was singing a popular Czech folk song about a little town not far away:

*Kolíne, Kolíne,
Stojíš v pěkné rovině.
Šenkuje tam má milá,
Má panenka rozmilá.
Šenkuje tam ve víně.*

"You sing that better than Czechs do," Ana said with a chuckle and only half-seriously. "Where'd you pick it up?"

"I don't know," Klaus stammered. "I've never even been to Kolín. It just flew into my head and started singing itself."

"I should've guessed that with a name like Stamm you'd be a drunk," Hermann said, while struggling to move Klaus forward.

"In the army," Klaus slurred, "they called me Corporal *Stammgast*."

Klaus further saluted. He saluted no one in particular, and again Ana chuckled. She also said to him: "That word is actually one of the few things Czechs and Germans can agree on. We spell '*štamgast*' a little differently, but it means the same exact thing: a

good-for-nothing drunk, wasting his life away at the same pub every night like the stump of a tree.”

“It’s only the same word,” Klaus retorted, “because you copied it from us. You people are incapable of an original idea. Just like you say ‘*brýle*’ and ‘*makléř*’ and ‘*hergot*.’ All German in their origin.”

“If you hold Czechs in such low regard,” Hermann interjected, “why do you speak their language so well?”

“Know thine enemy,” Klaus cried out. “Know thine enemy!”

“Is that what you think of me, Klaus?” Ana asked.

“I’m going to turn you into a German, my dear.”

“*Ježíšmarja!* As if I didn’t have enough problems.”

Klaus didn’t exactly respond to this. He just collapsed unconscious onto the sidewalk.

“Well, I think it’s time for me to go home,” Ana said to Hermann, though he could tell that she didn’t want their night to end any more than he did.

“Let me walk you home,” Hermann insisted. “It’ll take me just a minute to get him into bed. Well, maybe it’ll take a little longer than that. But you can wait in the lobby.”

“I can get home on my own, you know,” she insisted back. “I’ll have you know that I was schooled by Eliška Krásnohorská herself.”

“Who’s Eliška Krásnohorská?”

“One of this country’s greatest writers — and a feminist.”

“What’s a feminist?”

“Someone who believes that women are just as strong and as capable as men, if not more so.”

“Then, I’m a feminist, too.”

“You can’t be a feminist!”

“Why not? I’ll have you know that my mother was a lot stronger than my father, in every respect, and more capable, too. She not only cooked the food, but she was the one who was responsible for putting it on the table as well.”

“Look, all I was trying to say is that I don’t need someone to walk me home.”

“I know you don’t. But Klaus would be very upset with me in the morning if he found out I let you walk home alone. That’s all.”

“That’s all? That’s the only reason you want to walk me home, Herr Weiss?”

Hermann responded by looking into her eyes. He looked so deeply into them that he lost not only himself but also his train of thought. Though somehow he was still able to shake his head.

Both of them smiled at this, but it was interrupted. It was interrupted by a loud knocking sound. Hermann tried to ignore the sound and remain back in his memory. But the sound was persistent and it eventually returned him to his bedroom, where he realized that the noise was coming from his front door. It kept getting louder and more frantic, and he stumbled off his bed and onto his feet, and he further stumbled out of the bedroom and toward the door.

“I’m coming,” he screeched, while noticing all the rain falling outside the window.

The door swung open in response, and there stood Klaus looking both wet and more excited than Hermann had seen him look since their reacquaintance.

“Captain Weber has just been murdered,” he yelled.

Chapter 26

With rain pouring down upon the windshield of the Mercedes, the driver of the car slammed his brakes in front of Colonel Reidl, who was standing smack in the middle of the road, not far from the front gates of the Pinkas Synagogue. The car, in turn, screeched its tires, and it came to a stop just a short distance from the man's knees. At the same time, both thunder and lightning struck, exposing Reidl's face, which expressed equal measures of shock and fear. Though neither of these had anything to do with the car that had almost hit him.

What made this fright so unusual was that Colonel Reidl was not a man to frighten easily. Not once during the first world war did he ever feel scared, not even during Verdun. But the enemy he was now facing was something quite different from any he had faced before. It was something unknown and seemingly omnipotent, and fear overtook him like a wave coming out of nowhere.

Seeing the man's expression and becoming a bit unnerved by it, Klaus reached for his door, and so did Hermann. But Klaus stopped him. He stopped him by saying, "You

better wait inside for the moment.”

Hermann nodded, and Klaus hesitantly exited the car, and just as hesitantly he made his way to the colonel, who suddenly forgot all about his fear.

Klaus saluted Reidl the moment he reached him, but the colonel didn't notice this. He didn't even seem to notice Klaus. All he noticed was Klaus's car and the man who was sitting in the back seat of it, and he pointed at him while growling, “What's he doing here?”

“I was going to take him back to Theresienstadt in the morning,” Klaus answered, while knowing full well that this wasn't an actual answer.

“But what is he doing *here*, captain? You have disobeyed a direct order.”

“He's a good police detective, colonel. Better than good. In a single 24-hour period, he's gotten much further with this investigation than what we were able to do in weeks. If we really want to find out who's behind these murders and stop him, he's our best chance. Actually, I'd say that he's our only chance.”

Reidl thought this over. He thought it over a long while with his face burning with a rancor that just wouldn't diffuse. He wasn't even sure whether his anger was more directed at Hermann or at Klaus.

“All right,” he eventually blurted out. “Bring out the Jew.”

Klaus did what he was told, and with the rain subsiding just a little Reidl led the two of them to the end of the synagogue gate, where sat a dead and very wet Captain Weber, who had been shot in the head, with his face expressing a horror similar to what the other three dead men expressed.

Right away, Hermann hurried up to the man, and he leaned down to check his

gunshot wound.

“It looks self-inflicted,” Hermann said. “Perhaps it happened in the struggle. Or perhaps he did it to himself.”

“Why would he do it to himself?” growled Reidl.

“Maybe to avoid something even worse.”

“But he was sat just like the others,” Klaus uttered, while pointing at the dead man.

“Yes,” Hermann uttered back. “It certainly would seem that he was killed by the same man.”

“That’s just brilliant deduction,” muttered Reidl.

In response to this, Hermann turned to the colonel and asked, “Were you here when he was killed?”

“Are you interrogating me, Jew?” Reidl barked, with his rancor about to overwhelm him even more than what his fear had almost done minutes earlier.

“Forgive me.”

“You better hope I will,” Reidl snapped, before turning to Klaus and adding, “After you left my office this evening, Captain Weber received a tip from one of his informants. Something he believed would categorically prove Maier was responsible for the killings. So, he went off to check it out, along with two of my men to protect him. He later called me just as I was finishing up at the office. He was very frightened on the phone. He said that he had been double-crossed and that this informant was actually the killer. I told him to go find my men and wait for me, but obviously he didn’t do this.”

“Did he mention the informant’s name?” Klaus asked.

“Someone named Malý,” Reidl answered.

“That’s the name of the man who pays the caretaker of the synagogues. Can I ask where Captain Weber called you from?”

“From inside the synagogue.”

“I wonder how he got inside it,” Hermann mumbled, while gazing at the darkened building and seeing that the front door was closed and undisturbed.

“I suppose the informant let him in,” Reidl said back. “Or maybe the door was open. Does it really matter?”

“You said that Weber was here with two of your men?” Klaus asked Reidl.

Reidl responded by pointing to another Mercedes down the street, which was much like Klaus’s. In the front seat of this car along with the driver sat two frightened young SS soldiers, and Reidl told Klaus: “Those two idiots of mine were with him. Like I said, I sent them with Weber specifically to protect them, but Weber instead ordered them to go look for Malý. They told me that, while they were searching for him, they saw a man lurking outside the synagogue in the graveyard behind it, and they chased him. They chased him not just through the cemetery but also through a handful of nearby streets before he gave them the slip. Then, when they came back to the synagogue, they found Weber dead just where he is right now. This was just before I arrived.”

“Take a look at this,” Hermann said, while grabbing a broken piece of the gate just above Weber’s head.

“What do you think did that?” Klaus asked.

“Maybe our killer,” Hermann answered.

“How could a man break metal like that?” Reidl mumbled.

“It could have been brittle,” Hermann told him. “Or maybe the killer is very strong.” Again, Hermann looked at the synagogue. He also pointed at it and said, “I would like to go inside.”

Chapter 27

As Hermann expected, the synagogue was locked, and they couldn't find a key to it on Captain Weber. Nor did Reidl's two men have one, and the men further insisted that the synagogue door was unlocked when they had arrived.

"If you want to go inside the building," Reidl told Klaus, "just break into it. It's not like you are going to get into trouble with the law."

But Hermann didn't want them to damage the synagogue, so he convinced both men that he could get inside the building without potentially disturbing evidence, and he and Klaus drove a short distance to Ivo's apartment, which didn't take them long to reach even when driving through the maze.

After parking outside the building, the two men entered through the unlocked front entrance and rose to Ivo's floor, where they knocked on his door.

There was no response, so they kept knocking until they finally woke the man up.

"Have I done something wrong?" Ivo cried out with both his hands raised in surrender, after he opened the door wearing only his shirt and saw the two wet men

standing outside of it.

“Not at all,” Hermann told him with a smile. “I’m sorry to wake you up, but we need you to open the door of the Pinkas Synagogue.”

“Right now?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Do you need to pray?”

“We need to investigate a crime that has just happened there.”

“Oh. Should I put on my overalls?”

“We don’t need you to do any work there. We just need you to open the front door. Simply put on a coat.”

“All right.”

Quickly, Ivo grabbed his coat from the nearby closet, and even more quickly he put it on. As he did, Hermann noticed how wet it was and he said, “We’re you out this evening?”

“What?” Ivo mumbled, with fright once again covering his face.

“Your coat is all wet. You must have been outside tonight.”

“Ah, yes. I, I went for a little walk. You can ask Mrs. Mlýnková. She saw me leave.”

“I believe you.”

Hermann believed Ivo, at least to a certain extent, but again he couldn’t help notice how guilty he looked. But he pretended not to notice this, and he and Klaus started down the stairs, with Ivo following them as best as he could to the building’s foyer. There he stepped into his wet slippers and went outside with the two men into the Mercedes,

which returned to the synagogue just as an ambulance drove off with Weber's body.

With the rain now only falling slightly, the three exited the car, and Ivo limped to the front of the building, followed by Hermann and Klaus. He further took out his set of keys and opened the creaky door. He did this before turning on the lights and letting Herman, Klaus, and Reidl inside, along with a group of six heavily armed soldiers, who had arrived at about the same time as the ambulance. Ivo also took out a pair of kippahs from his coat pocket. One he put on his head and the other he gave to Hermann, who put it on as well.

"I really don't understand what you expect to find here," Reidl said, while shaking his head, as he gazed into the long and narrow prayer hall. "Obviously, the killer must be long gone."

"It's what he may have left behind that interests me," Hermann said back, before turning to Ivo and asking, "Is there by any chance an arched wooden door here like the ones in the Spanish and Klausen Synagogues?"

"Why?" Reidl demanded. "Why would you be looking for such a thing?"

"'Why' is what we are trying to discover, colonel," Klaus answered.

"Is there such a door, Ivo?" Hermann went on.

Ivo nodded, and he pointed in its direction, and everyone rushed to it, and not surprisingly they found the door locked.

"You don't have a key to this one, either, I suppose," Hermann said to Ivo, who shook his head over and over, looking just as guilty as he had in the Spanish Synagogue.

"We really need to get inside this door," Klaus told Reidl, while pointing at it.

"So, shoot off the lock," Reidl growled.

“We could damage evidence,” Hermann insisted, much like he had when Reidl wanted to break into the building, with his insistence again having more to do with not wanting to destroy the synagogue.

“I have a better way of doing it,” Klaus told everyone.

Chapter 28

The six soldiers stood emotionlessly in front of the arched wooden door with a battering ram in their arms, with three men standing on each side of it.

“Now!” Klaus ordered, and the men jerked the ram backward before slamming it into the door. Though this accomplished little. “Harder!” Klaus added. “Much harder!” The men obeyed, but the door still held.

“They’d do better with a running start,” Hermann suggested.

“Five steps back,” Klaus told the men, and once they had done this, he ordered them to charge.

They did this, and this time they knocked the thick door open, exposing an old stone staircase and lots of eerie darkness, which mixed with all the dust caused by the door slamming into the wall. While staring at this, Klaus, Hermann, and Reidl all hesitated. But they didn’t hesitate for long, and the three stepped through the doorway and started down the short staircase, with Klaus illuminating the way with a flashlight. Slowly, they descended the stairs, very slowly, but it still didn’t take them long before

they reached an unfinished cellar with a dirt floor.

While glancing around the room, Hermann asked Klaus for the flashlight.

Klaus complied, and Hermann steadily moved the light across the small and mostly empty basement. Almost at once, the light came upon the door to a dumbwaiter, and Hermann paused the light over it for a few seconds before continuing around the room. Soon, he found something even more interesting: a pair of large footprints in the dirt that led to a wall, which had a large Star of David painted on it.

“Very strange,” Hermann said, while focusing the light on the footprints.

“What’s so strange about them?” Klaus asked.

“Look how deep they are.”

“If he were carrying Weber . . .”

“How could Weber have come down here? How would he have gotten through the door upstairs?”

Klaus answered by taking the flashlight and walking up to the door of the dumbwaiter, which he opened. He further shined the light into the shallow compartment itself and quickly shook his head while uttering, “Not even Weber could’ve fit in that.”

“Forgetting about him for just a moment,” Hermann said back, before walking up to Klaus and retaking the flashlight, which he again shined on the footprints. He did this before adding, “Look how oddly the prints are shaped and how flat they are. They have no heels, and the sizes of them are just enormous. Have you ever seen anyone with feet that large?”

The attributes of the footprints suddenly made Hermann think of something that he hadn’t thought about in a long time, and this made him chuckle a bit.

“Do you find something funny in all this, Jew?” Reidl asked, while shaking his head.

“I was laughing at myself just now, colonel,” Hermann told him. “Because something outrageous had just occurred to me.”

“What was that?” Klaus asked.

“That these could be the footprints of a golem,” Hermann told him, while recalling all the stories his father had told him about the legendary beast, which made him smile even more, especially when he remembered the man behind the stories as well.

“A golem?” Klaus uttered, with the word sounding only vaguely familiar to him.

“A giant man made of clay. One with brute strength but a very limited capacity for thought. Some say that the legend is what inspired Mary Shelley to write *Frankenstein*.”

“Yes, I remember seeing a movie about a golem when we were in college. Is that what you mean?”

“Exactly. Well, not exactly. Paul Wegener, the director of that film, took many liberties with the legend. In the film, if you remember, they inserted some amulet in the golem’s chest to make it come alive.”

“Yes, I remember that.”

“But in the actual legend, a certain Rabbi Loew about three hundred years ago used the secrets contained in that book of Jewish mysticism we found at the Spanish Synagogue to create a golem. Like in the film, he did so to protect the city’s Jews. Though, instead of using an amulet, to bring it to life he carved the Hebrew word for ‘truth’ into the monster’s forehead. He afterward turned it off by wiping the first letter off

the word, which transformed it into the Hebrew word for ‘death.’ You know, I always found it interesting that the Hebrew words for ‘truth’ and ‘death’ were so similar. Anyway, what’s even more interesting is that this Rabbi Loew really did live. He’s buried up in that cemetery next to this synagogue. Some people, to this day even, think that the golem was real. I used to hear talk all the time that it was locked away in the attic of the Old-New Synagogue, which is just a few blocks from here. There was actually this old woman a number of years back who came to my office and demanded that I investigate as to whether it was really up there.”

“Did you?”

“Did I investigate it? If I had, I would’ve been fired long before you people came to town.”

“You think that’s what killed Weber?” Reidl asked, with his face once again expressing all kinds of fear, which was replicated on Klaus’s face as well.

“Of course not,” Hermann insisted, while being surprised by the expressions on both men’s faces. “It’s preposterous. That’s why I was laughing at myself just now. Though it’s certainly possible that the killer wanted his victims to believe that a golem was pursuing them, so to frighten them away and anyone else who might get in his way. Now, that would make sense.”

“So, what do you think happened?” Klaus mumbled.

“That is indeed the question, among many others, such as: if you’re right, Klaus, that Weber came down here, why would he have done so after Colonel Reidl ordered him to wait? And why was Major Fischer so obsessed with going down to the cellar in the Klausen Synagogue?”

“For your sake,” Reidl said to Hermann, “you better come up with some answers to these questions, and quickly.”

Chapter 29

With the rain now having completely ceased, Klaus's Mercedes came to a stop in front of Hermann's apartment building, outside of which stood Hermann's two guards for the evening under an awning, who were looking exactly as they had when the pair left them hours earlier.

Slowly, Hermann stepped out of the back door of the car, and as he did he asked Klaus: "Would it be okay if I took a short walk before I went to bed? I need to unwind a little."

"All right," Klaus told him with a nod, and Hermann started down Eliška Krásnohorská Street. He did so while noticing a nearby street sign with the woman's name on it, and he recalled just how much the woman had meant to Ana and how she had inspired her in so many ways, both during her time spent in the woman's prep school and long afterward. This was the reason that the two had rented their apartment on her street all those years earlier, which had been named after her while she was still alive, much like how the train station had been named after President Masaryk long before he passed.

Hermann continued down the dark and empty street, and Klaus glanced at the guards nearby and nodded toward Hermann, and the two men followed him while remaining a good distance back.

Hermann, though, didn't notice them. He didn't even notice what was in front of him. All he noticed was that Ana had her trembling arm wrapped around his and that they were walking down the busy sidewalk not long after they were married. It was a hot and bright summer's day and Ana was holding a parasol in her free hand, which protected both their faces.

Like what often happened whenever the pair were out together, many people gawked at them and the height difference between them. Usually, this amused the two. But on this day nothing amused them. They didn't even notice it.

"Are you angry with me?" Ana whispered, with her face expressing both fear and dread, and her jaw quivering a bit. She was feeling more fright at that moment than she ever imagined was possible.

"Don't be ridiculous," he whispered back, though he couldn't hide his own fear and dread, which were driven by a number of things. He felt the news that she had just given him was sending his life spinning away from him and that there was nothing he could do about it. Still, he also felt that, as long as her arm was wrapped tightly around his, he could somehow muddle through this and through anything else he would ever have to face.

"I'm sorry," she muttered, with her eyes beginning to tear up.

"Don't ever say that again," he muttered back, with his eyes tearing even more than hers. "Don't ever be sorry again. You couldn't do anything to be sorry about."

Silently, they continued on, and she gripped his arm even harder than before. She gripped it as hard as she could. But Hermann couldn't feel this. He couldn't because the memory of her faded as quickly as it appeared, along with that sunny summer day, and he continued walking alone into the empty night. He walked until he reached Old Town Square, which was empty as well, and there at once he noticed the statue of Jan Hus in the center of it.

The statue drew Hermann like a magnet, and he soon found himself under it. He also found himself there back on the night he first met Ana, and he was kissing her, doing so while she leaned toward him so that her lips could meet his.

At this moment, both his hands were gently clenching one of hers, while her other was making its way through his impossible brown curls. Their bodies were also far apart, with both their lips and eyes closed, and the two of them were smiling.

It was actually Hermann's first kiss, even though he was already 23, and he wanted to never return from the sense of calm it created in him. It made him feel content with himself for the first time.

Still, something caused Hermann's eyes to open just a little, and he saw the towering figure of the pre-Reformation martyr hovering over him. He also saw that the man was looking far from pleased. This briefly made him wonder what would happen to him right now if Hus were alive. He wondered if he'd be the one who'd end up getting burned at the stake.

Suddenly, Ana, too, opened her eyes, and she, too, saw the statue, and with great embarrassment and with her face flushed, she broke their kiss and rushed off toward the safety of Železná Street.

Not knowing what to do, Hermann followed her. He followed her much like a puppy dog. “What’s wrong?” he called out.

“I was not expecting that kiss, Herr Weiss,” she called back.

“I’m sorry. I swear I am. I don’t even know what came over me. I’m not like that. Really.”

Ana responded by pointing back to the statue, without actually looking at it, and she said, “And underneath Master Hus, no less. My father would kill me. We’re Hussites, you know.”

“I didn’t know. *Je mi líto.*”

Hearing Hermann not only apologize in Czech, but also hearing the sincerity in his voice, Ana slowed down a little, and so did he, though he kept a safe distance from her. “It’s all right,” she told him. “Just give me a little warning next time.”

“I will,” he insisted. “I promise.”

Quickly, she came to a stop, and she spun toward him, causing him to stop right in front of her.

“What was it like?” she asked.

“What was what like?” he asked back.

“The war.”

He didn’t answer her right away. He didn’t because he was surprised that he wasn’t hearing the sounds of war in his ears, and this is when he realized that he really hadn’t left the calm state he had experienced in her kiss.

“Did you hear me?” she asked.

“What?” he asked back.

“What was the war like?”

“It, it was nothing like those romantic novels you read when you’re young. It was nothing like them at all. Sometimes we would fight for months over the same trench in the middle of nowhere. Like at Verdun. Especially there. It didn’t even seem to me like we were trying to win anything there. It seemed to be about killing as many people as possible, as if none of our lives had any value. Not just the lives of the enemy but ours as well. I saw so many people die for a trench, Ana. A lousy trench. I was scared all the time. I tell you, not for a second was I brave.”

“But you saved those men’s lives, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but it wasn’t like how it was described in that newspaper article. It wasn’t my intention to save them. Not really. I was just trying not to get killed. That’s all I was doing. I don’t deserve any of those medals. You don’t know how many times I’ve tried to throw them all away. Even the one the emperor pinned on me.”

“But you didn’t throw them away, did you?”

“No,” Hermann answered, with a slow shake of his head, and with his eyes lowered a bit.

“That’s because you are a hero,” Ana insisted. “You acted in spite of being scared, and that’s all that matters. And I don’t want to ever hear you say again that you aren’t a hero. Not if you want a relationship with me, Herr Weiss. Is that understood?”

“Yes, no — relationship?”

She didn’t answer his question with words. Instead, she kissed him. She kissed him far more passionately than they had been kissing before, and this both surprised and shocked him, and he quickly broke their embrace.

“What’s wrong?” she cried out.

“You’re Klaus’s girl,” was his response, which caused Ana to chuckle and caused him to ask, “What’s so funny?”

“You are,” she answered. “Here you are this big brave war hero, wrapped inside a naive little boy.”

“What do you mean?” he cried out, while trying to muster indignation that just wasn’t in him.

“It’s not me Klaus is in love with,” she said.

With this, the memory of her faded, leaving Hermann and the empty square, along with the statue of Jan Hus, who was glowering at him just as he had more than two decades earlier. Eventually, Hermann turned around and saw the two guards waiting for him a short distance back at the edge of the square, where they continued waiting until Hermann passed them and made his way back home.

It didn’t take him long to reach Eliška Krásnohorská Street once more, and with a bit of surprise he saw that Klaus’s Mercedes was still in front of his building and that Klaus himself was still staring at him. Though he wished he wasn’t. He wished this hard.

Chapter 30

Alone in the Pinkas Synagogue, Ivo tidied up the place. He did this while realizing that he would have to spend quite a bit of time the following day repairing the arched wooden door and fixing its lock.

Before long, the synagogue was mostly returned to its previous order, and he left the empty and dark building and locked its front door, and he limped his way toward the gate and Široká Street beyond it. He limped with great fatigue and expressed even more pain than he had displayed before. But just as he got to the cobblestone sidewalk, he experienced something that made him forget all about his fatigue and his pain and everything else. He bumped right into the woman with the paisley shawl.

At once, they both jumped back in fear, and the woman looked as if she were about to run. But she didn't run, and not even she knew why. She just stood there and stared at the man, and he did likewise, while expressing even more fright than what she was expressing.

"Who, who are you?" he finally mumbled, and when she didn't answer, he

pointed at himself and told her his name.

The woman didn't intend to reply. Once again, she wanted to rush off. But instead she mumbled back, "Klara."

"That's a pretty name," he said.

"Thank you," she said back.

"Your shawl, too, is pretty."

"A friend gave it to me."

"It's good to have friends, isn't it?"

Again, she made no response, and he uttered, "Are you Jewish?"

"Why would you think that?" she asked.

"I've seen you many nights by the synagogues."

"I'm not Jewish. I just like being around the buildings. They seem peaceful and safe."

"They are."

"I like to be near them, just like I like to be near the river. They, they both bring me comfort."

"I do hope you didn't get too wet tonight."

"No, I was standing underneath an —"

"— Klara?" interrupted a female voice from down the street. "Is that you?"

"I, I better go," Klara muttered to Ivo, and she slowly started backing up toward the woman, who had called her from the corner of Žatecká Street a half block away.

"I could show you one of them sometime," Ivo said. "The synagogues, I mean. I could show you any one you'd like to see anytime you'd like. I work in them."

“I know. I’ve seen you inside them and around them.”

“Me, too.”

She smiled at this a bit, and he mumbled, “Well, goodnight.”

“To you as well.”

Quickly, she turned away from him and hurried off.

“I’ll be around tomorrow night as well,” he called out.

Her only response was to slow down just a little before again hurrying off, and now it was his turn to smile.

Chapter 31

In spite of not getting much sleep the night before, Hermann again awoke when the sun began seeping into his drapeless bedroom window. But unlike the previous morning, Ana was sleeping peacefully in his arms, much as she had done countless times before. This had always been his favorite part of the day, so he enjoyed this memory more than all the others he had experienced since returning to Prague. He enjoyed it so much that he tried to will it to last forever. But eventually the memory faded just like all the others had, and like the morning before, he again cleaned himself in the bathroom mirror as best he could and his guards again drove him toward the palace.

As the car made its way down Maiselova Street that morning, Hermann saw Ivo limping down the road. He also saw him smiling, which was something Ivo had been doing since the night before, and Hermann asked the driver to pull alongside the man.

It didn't take long before the car was right beside Ivo, and Hermann rolled down his window and softly called out Ivo's name, which caused the man to come to a stop along with the car, and he turned to it, with his smile fading as he did.

“Good morning,” Hermann said to him, and the man replied in kind. “I wanted to thank you for getting up last night for us.”

“That’s my job,” Ivo told him. “To help you people.”

“You’re going to work early this morning.”

“I have a lot of work to do.”

“Can I give you a lift?”

“I’m just going to the Maisel,” Ivo insisted, while pointing the way. “To give it a good thorough cleaning this morning.”

“We’re headed that way, too,” Hermann told him. “Get inside.”

Ivo obliged, and the car started forward, moving much slower than before, just as Hermann had instructed the driver to do the moment Ivo opened the door.

“It must be pretty hard getting around town with those feet of yours,” Hermann said.

“Not all the time,” Ivo countered. “Dr. Brod, he’s performed miracles for my feet. He’s a feet doctor, you know.”

“Was he a member of the synagogue?”

Ivo nodded, and Hermann added, “Tell me: how long have you worked in the synagogue? I mean the Maisel.”

“Ever since I was a teenager,” Ivo answered. “I was an orphan, you know.” Ivo further pointed down the road and continued: “I used to beg right down there on Old Town Square, by where Master Hus’ statue is. Do you know it?”

“I know it,” Hermann said with a grin. “I know it well.”

“But it wasn’t there when I was a boy. They hadn’t built it yet. But not far from

where it is now I used to sit on the cobblestones and beg for my supper every day. Then, Rabbi Popper found me.”

Ivo at this moment couldn't help recall his old life, and while thinking about those times, he remembered just how cold he always was, no matter what the weather was like. He was always hungry, too. Sometimes he was a little hungry and many times he was a lot hungry, but he was always some hungry.

Hermann and Ivo actually shared a lot in common, even if they didn't realize that they had. This commonality created something of a bond between them, especially from Hermann's perspective. So, he wanted to protect the man as much as possible. But to really do this, he needed to discover exactly what Ivo knew about the crimes and how he was involved in them.

“You like Rabbi Popper, don't you?” Hermann asked, even though he well knew the answer.

“Very much so,” Ivo answered. “And Mrs. Popperová, too. She's the one who taught me how to make potato dumplings, which is my favorite dish. She's a very patient woman, that Mrs. Popperová. It took her all day to teach an idiot like me how to make them, and she did it on a Sunday, too. But she did it somehow. Now, every night I make them. I make them all by myself. They're good, too. As good as what I used to eat in restaurants, and much cheaper. Now, I can afford to eat as many potato dumplings as I want, and sometimes I eat a lot of them. Now, I'm never hungry.”

Ivo finished saying this just as the car pulled up in front of the Maisel Synagogue, and with his eyes lowered a bit, he mumbled, “I miss both of them terribly. I miss many of the people who are gone. I guess, I guess I'm just too dumb to understand.”

“What is it that you don’t understand?” Hermann asked.

“Why everyone hates you people so much.”

“You’re not dumb at all, Ivo. You’re a lot smarter than you think. A lot smarter than most people around here.”

Ivo nodded unsurely, and he opened his door and started to climb out of the car.

“Just one more question,” Hermann said, causing Ivo to stop and turn toward him.

“You were with Major Fischer at the Klausen Synagogue the day he was killed, is that right?”

“Who?” Ivo asked.

“Major Fischer. He was the SS officer who was always trying to get into the cellar over there. You know, he was wearing a black uniform much like the one my friend wears. The man you always see me with.”

“Oh, him. He, he’s not a nice man at all. He’s always yelling at me and telling me how he is going to kill me one day. He even hit me once. It’s not my fault I’m dumb. The rabbi never yelled at me. He always smiled at me when I did something dumb. Mrs. Popperová, too. That Sunday, when she taught me how to make potato dumplings, she smiled at me all day long.”

“Was the last time you saw Major Fischer that afternoon in the Klausen?”

Ivo thought about this for a moment. He thought about it hard and said, “When I saw him last, it was late in the afternoon just before I left for home, so I could make my dumplings.”

“And what time did you leave that day?”

Again, Ivo thought hard about the question, and he answered by signifying five

o'clock with his fingers, much as he had the day before.

Hermann smiled at this, and Ivo told him: "I must go now." He further left the car and limped inside the synagogue, with Hermann staring at him and surer than ever that he was somehow involved in the murders, even if he was no surer how.

Chapter 32

Much like the morning before, Hermann arrived early at the palace. But unlike then, Marta was waiting for him, holding another piping hot cup of coffee, which she smilingly handed to him as soon as he stopped at her desk, with his two guards stopping a short distance behind him.

He smiled back at her, and as he took the cup he told her: “Thank you, Marta. Just what I needed as always.”

“I had a busy day yesterday,” she told him back, while watching him take a sip of the coffee, which was just before she picked up a notepad off her desk that had lots of notes scrawled on it.

“Tell me all about it.”

“First, I checked with city records to see who was responsible for those synagogues in Josefov, and I discovered that the responsibility for all six of them belongs to a joint-stock company called Golem a.s.”

“A very interesting choice of name. Were you able to find anything about this

company, such as its owners?”

“I had to check state records for that. The stockholders of the company are six limited liability companies, and when I researched each of these, I discovered that the same person is listed as the responsible party for all of them.”

“Let me guess: his name is Malý.”

“How’d you guess?”

“His name came up quite a bit yesterday. But we don’t know anything but his last name. Perhaps you can fill in the details.”

“I can. His full name is Antonín Malý. He’s an attorney who has an office at the Palác Dunaj. That’s that new office building on Národní. You know, the modern-looking one with the paternoster. Anyway, I checked him out with the bar association.”

“And?”

“And they don’t exactly have a fond opinion of him, to say the least. He’s almost been disbarred more than once and a slew of complaints have been filed against him by his former clients.”

“That makes him a rather interesting choice to be named responsible for six irreplaceable buildings.”

“I didn’t understand it, either. So, I tried calling this Mr. Malý to get more information about the arrangement he has with them. I called him all morning and into the afternoon, but no one ever picked up the phone. So, I decided to go there myself.”

“So, that’s where you were yesterday when I got back here.”

“That’s where I was. I even took the paternoster up to his office.”

“And you lived to tell about it?”

“Apparently.”

“Ana and I actually rode up and down in one of those things on our wedding day,” Hermann muttered, with a big smile on his face, as he recalled the day and all its many moments. They all came rushing back to him at once. “I can’t even tell you how many times we did.”

Marta returned Hermann’s smile, and she told him: “Anyway, this Malý has a small office on the third floor, all the way in the back. But he wasn’t there when I arrived. I had to wait until the very end of the day for him to show up.”

“Did he tell you anything when he did?”

“Not much. The only information he would give me is that he’s not the owner of Golem a.s. or of any of the limited liability companies that control it. He’s simply representing the actual owners, but he wouldn’t tell me who the owners actually were.”

“Excellent work as usual, Marta. If it were up to me, I’d make you a detective.”

“Then, I’m glad it’s not up to you. My husband complains enough about the hours I work.”

“But I bet he’s never complained about your pay.”

“Not once.”

Hermann grinned at this, and knowing that Klaus would be arriving soon he drained the rest of the coffee before telling her: “There’s just one little thing I want you to do for me today. I would like you to find out all you can about a certain Gertrude Gross. She’s a well-to-do socialite whose husband died recently. Whatever information you find, put it on a piece of paper and place this folded-over in the top drawer of your desk, in case I need it when you’re not around. Then, feel free to take some time off. You’ve

earned it.”

Hermann said this and returned the cup, and he started toward his office.

“Can I ask you something, Herr Weiss?” she whispered, while eyeing the guards behind Hermann.

This caused Hermann to stop and turn to her, and he whispered back, “You can ask me anything.”

“What are you doing with these Nazis?”

“You know, that’s a really good question. It’s one I’ve had to ask myself more than once. At first, they didn’t give me any choice, if you know what I mean. But even then I wanted to say no, and I only didn’t because I once promised Ana that I wouldn’t just give up. But I truly expected to do the job only by rote. Though that hasn’t happened.”

“Why is that?”

“I can’t easily explain it, not even to myself, but this case is leading me somewhere, Marta. I don’t know where just now, or even where this feeling is coming from, but I know that this case is taking me somewhere I need to go.”

“People are talking.”

Marta elaborated on this by nodding down the hall, and Hermann looked in this direction and saw a pair of uniformed Czech policemen glaring at him. “They think that you are collaborating with them,” she told him.

“I’ve actually wondered about that myself, to be honest,” he told her back, with his face losing some of its color. “Even though I’m not helping them catch Jews or partisans — even though I’m not helping them advance their agenda in any way. I’ve

wondered if even helping them investigate a normal crime constituted collaboration. I've wondered if help were something fungible, that, if by providing it, I was freeing up the time of another man who'd then be able to commit atrocities."

"If that were true, we'd all be collaborators."

"Maybe we are. Maybe even the simple act of driving on the right-hand side of the road is a form of collaboration. Just imagine if everyone suddenly started driving on the left-hand side again. What would they do? Would they shoot 7 million people?"

"It wouldn't be the fear of 7 million shot that would scare people from doing this. It would be the fear that they would be among the first ones shot."

Hermann had no response to this, and the conversation fell silent.

"Can, can I ask what you're helping them investigate?" Marta asked.

"Just some dead Nazis," Hermann answered.

"All I can say is that I hope the investigation leads to making some more of them."

Hermann had to smile at this, which remained on his face until he heard someone nearby loudly clear his voice. It was Klaus.

Chapter 33

As Hermann and Klaus methodically marched down the corridor toward Hermann's office, Hermann tried to gauge his former friend. He tried to figure out what he was thinking and feeling. But he was drawing a blank. It was as if Klaus had put up a wall, not just between him and Hermann but between him and the entire world.

"I sure hope that you won't hold what Marta just said against her," Hermann murmured.

"I don't know what you mean," Klaus told him, without showing any emotion on his face. "But she might want to be more careful about what she says in the future, because next time someone just may be paying attention."

Hermann nodded, and he stepped inside his office along with Klaus, who closed the door and asked, "So, how do you want to proceed today?"

Hermann answered the question by asking a question of his own: "Do you believe Colonel Reidl's story from last night?"

"There may have been some small bits of truth mixed into the story, but not much.

Do you think he could be the killer?"

"He would've had just as much trouble carrying those men as Lieutenant Maier, if not more so. And from the look on his face last night, I would say that he was very scared, and not of us."

The two men at this moment sat beside Hermann's desk, and Hermann added, "But he's involved somehow, even if it's just tangentially. He and Captain Weber almost certainly framed Maier, and there must be a reason why. As Czechs like to say, '*ani kuře zadarmo nehrabe.*'"

Not even a chicken scratches for nothing.

This was a saying that a veteran detective taught Hermann on his very first case, and it was something that he applied on just about every case that came after it: the belief that no act, criminal or otherwise, is really random. That behind every one there is some motive, and if you can discover what this motive is, you'll likely discover who's behind the act.

"So, how do we find out why this particular chicken was scratching?" Klaus asked.

"Do you have access to the murdered men's personnel files?" Hermann asked back.

Klaus answered by rising to his feet, and he headed toward the door.

Chapter 34

Klaus soon returned to the office, and he tossed four folders onto the desk in front of Hermann, who opened each of them side-by-side, exposing the personnel files and photographs of the 4 murdered men.

“Now what?” Klaus asked.

“We need to find a connection between them and Reidl. By the way, was Reidl at that party of Colonel Mueller’s?”

“He was. He mentioned it to me when I first brought the subject up. But he insisted that he didn’t recall meeting either Schiller and Fischer at the party or at any other time. He said that there were quite a few people at the party, and Mueller’s guest list certainly backs that up.”

“Still, we know that he at least had the opportunity to meet and talk with both of them. Now, what do these files tell us?”

Carefully, Klaus examined the files, and Hermann looked at them as well. They both did this for many minutes. But eventually Klaus shook his head and said, “If there is a connection between all of them, I don’t see it. It’s certainly not in plain sight.”

“If solving murders were as easy as looking in plain sight,” Hermann told him, “there’d never be any unsolved ones. Let’s start with the basic facts about these men and then drill down from there.”

Klaus responded by spreading the files across the desk and emptying their contents, and he asked Hermann: “Which basic facts do you want to start with?”

“How about where they were from?”

“They, they were from all over the place. Schiller was from Danzig, for example, and Fischer was from Koenigsberg. Gruber was from Essen, and Weber grew up not far from me in Tetschen.”

“Have they served together or trained with one another at any time?”

Quickly, Klaus scanned through the information. He did this and shook his head.

“Do they have any common skills or traits?” was Hermann’s next question.

Again, Klaus looked through the files, and he said, “Like I told you before, they were all well trained and capable soldiers. They also all had significant combat experience other than Weber, and the three were all decorated for valor, too. Nothing extraordinary, though. Nothing like you.”

“Did they have any special skills?” Hermann asked, while ignoring Klaus’s last remark.

“Captain Gruber had some interesting skills,” Klaus answered, after spending a considerable time gleaning facts from the information in front of him. “He was an expert in Jewish studies. He even knew Hebrew fluently.”

“That’s more than I can say. Maybe he was the one who was looking at that Kabbalah book in the Spanish Synagogue. Maybe he even brought the book there.”

“One other thing,” Klaus uttered, after once more spending considerable time looking through the folders. “Other than Weber, all the men had some disciplinary problems, too. Nothing extraordinary, though.”

“So,” Hermann uttered back, “other than Weber, they were all competent and brave. Though not too brave, and they didn’t exactly walk what your version of the Bible calls the ‘straight and narrow.’”

“What exactly are you getting at?”

“If you were looking to recruit a group of men to commit a crime . . .”

“These men would be suitable. But what crime?”

“That’s for us to find out. Can we search through these men’s belongings? Just as importantly, may we?”

“We both can and may. But Schiller’s wife has probably already left town. And my understanding is that Weber’s mother is on her way to Prague to pick up his belongings right now, and that she makes her son look agreeable in comparison.”

“He was the exception, anyway.”

“That leaves Gruber and Fischer.”

Hermann nodded, and he rose from his seat while collecting the two men’s personnel files. He also glanced at the clock on the wall, and seeing that it was approaching 9:00, he added, “But first there’s a certain lawyer that we need to visit.”

Chapter 35

The driver of the Mercedes came to a stop in front of the Palác Dunaj on Národní Avenue, which was one of the main arteries in the city and connected the river with the center of town before stopping a block short of Wenceslas Square, at the very heart of this center.

At this moment, the driver had a big smile on his face, happy that he was finally able to drive the two somewhere without Hermann's help.

Quickly, both Hermann and Klaus exited the car, and they marched inside the building, where, after passing the building's reception area in the foyer, they came upon a pair of small elevator-like shafts. Through these passed a continuous chain of equally small cars that could hold 2 to 3 people, which went up in one shaft and down in the other while moving at a speed slow enough for someone, in theory, to climb into or out of one without killing themselves. The contraption was called a paternoster and was called this because the chain of cars resembled to many the beads of a rosary, which, in turn, recalled the Latin prayer that was often said along with them. But Klaus truly believed that the name really derived from the prayer itself, and the need to say it whenever setting

foot on one.

Without any hesitation, Hermann made his way to the shaft in which cars were moving upward, but Klaus continued past both of them while telling Hermann: “I’ll take the stairs and meet you up there.”

“You’re not afraid of a little paternoster, are you?” Hermann asked, with a bit of a grin.

It was obvious even to Klaus that this was a joke, but he stopped with lots of indignation anyway, and he spun toward Hermann and said, “It’s not fear. They’re too slow.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone that you were scared.”

Hermann said this with his grin still on his face, and he stepped into a car just before Klaus jumped on board as well. The latter did so while involuntarily recalling the Lord’s Prayer, which he hadn’t even thought of since attending Catholic school many years earlier. Just as involuntarily, he also began reciting the words in his head:

Pater noster, qui es in caelis,

sanctificetur nomen tuum.

Adveniat regnum tuum.

Fiat voluntas tua,

sicut in caelo, et in terra.

Quickly, Klaus finished reciting these verses, and he fast-forwarded to the final one: the one that asked God to “deliver us from evil.”

Seeing the fright on Klaus's face and enjoying it, Hermann said to him: "I've heard that if you miss the last floor going up or the first floor going down, the paternoster *chops off* your head as the car moves from one shaft to the other."

"Nonsense," Klaus mumbled, as the two approached the second floor. Though, at the same time, his eyes rose to the ceiling.

Hermann wanted to chuckle in response to this, but he couldn't. He couldn't because everything around him suddenly changed, into the paternoster he and Ana had rode up in at City Hall on their wedding day. He was also back in the suit that Mr. Jacobs had made for him and she was back in her wedding dress, gripping her flower bouquet.

They were just reaching the top floor of the building and were continuing up. At the same time, the handful of people who were waiting in the hallway for their turn to get into one of the downward cars smiled knowingly at the two, and moments after that the couple passed the floor and were in total darkness. They were also kissing once again in their own private parlor as the cabin shifted to the downward shaft.

"You're my alpha and omega," he mumbled through his pursed lips, while drinking in her perfume and thinking how strange it was that a Jew was paraphrasing *Revelations*, especially at this moment. But the words just seemed right.

Ana couldn't reply to these words. She couldn't because Hermann was again riding up the paternoster in the Palác Dunaj with Klaus, who jumped off the car onto the third floor the first moment he was able to do so. Hermann followed, and the two walked all the way to the last office in the corridor. There stood Mr. Malý's door, which Hermann knocked on.

"*Dále,*" came a soft male voice from the other side of the door, and Hermann

opened it, and he and Klaus stepped inside an office that was so small that it reminded Hermann of the closet in the Theresienstadt gendarmerie. Inside this office, they saw a large balding man. A man who seemed to barely fit in the room. It was almost as if he had been squeezed inside it with a shoe horn.

The man smiled warmly at the two, as if he had been expecting them.

“Antonín Malý?” Hermann asked.

“Indeed that is I,” Malý answered. “Please, gentlemen, come in and have a seat.”

They obliged, sitting in the two chairs in front of Malý’s desk, and after Hermann introduced both Klaus and himself to the man, he said to Malý: “It is our understanding that you are responsible for the synagogues in Josefov.”

“Your understanding is correct,” Malý told him.

“Can you tell us who retained your services?”

“The Jewish community, of course.”

“Is it safe to assume that the six limited liability companies that you represent each represent the six synagogues in Josefov?”

“You can assume anything you’d like.”

“Do you have a long-standing relationship with the Jewish community here?”

“I wouldn’t exactly say that.”

“So, why would they engage you for this?”

“You’d have to ask them that.”

“That would be rather difficult under the circumstances.”

“Yes, it would.”

“Can I ask where you were last night?”

“If this is an official interrogation, perhaps I should get a lawyer.”

“You are a lawyer.”

“But not a very good one.”

“You can either answer our questions here or in Černín Palace,” Klaus told him, while glaring at the man. “But in neither case shall you have a lawyer present. Though I can assure you that the questioning would be far more pleasant here.”

“Well, if you put it that way,” Malý uttered, “what was the question again?”

“Where were you last night?” Hermann asked, while having a difficult time being objective. This was because he couldn’t help like Mr. Malý. Though he tried not to show this.

“Home,” the man answered. “I was home all night. It’s on Celetná, by the way.”

“Can anyone attest to your whereabouts?”

“Not a soul.”

“Last night, a certain SS captain named Weber was murdered in Josefov. Before he was killed, he both placed you at the crime and implicated you in it. Not just in the murder but also in some related conspiracy.”

“I know no such SS captain. Or any SS captain, for that matter.”

“So, you deny that you were his informant?”

“I do deny it. Are you sure that it was me he implicated?”

“He didn’t specify a first name, but —”

“— Malý is not such an unusual surname.”

“The murder occurred near or in one of the properties you are responsible for.”

“That still doesn’t mean that it was me who committed the murder. I further deny

that it was me.”

“You do understand that it looks very bad for you right now, don’t you?”

“I understand perfectly. I’m not *that* bad of a lawyer.”

“Captain Stamm right now has more than enough cause to drag you to Černín Palace, which is a place you’d unlikely return.”

“If that was your intention, gentlemen, you would have done so already.”

“Very well,” Hermann mumbled, as he rose to his feet along with Klaus. “Just keep in mind that you are our chief suspect. You’re actually our only suspect at the moment.”

“Sir, under a Nazi occupation, everyone’s a suspect. Whether you’re the chief one or the only one hardly seems to matter.”

As much as he didn’t want to, Hermann had to smile at this, and he and Klaus left the office, closing the door behind themselves.

“I really should have arrested him,” Klaus said, as the two slowly made their way down the hallway.

“Like Ivo,” Hermann said back, “he’s almost certainly involved in all this somehow. But while he’s physically capable of both killing those men and carrying them, it just doesn’t seem in his nature to commit such brutal crimes, or that he would even be driven to violence. I think it’s far better to let him stay loose and see where he takes us. Can you put a tail on him?”

“I doubt Reidl will approve it.”

“He’s just an ordinary Czech citizen. Have the local police follow him. Tell them that we suspect him of black-market activities or something like that. Tell them anything

you want but the truth, or they just may be inclined to help him.”

Chapter 36

In a small single-room flat, Hermann riffled through what were once the belongings of Captain Gruber. He did this while both recognizing and enjoying the irony of a Jew searching through an SS man's things.

"I suppose you don't know what you are looking for," said Klaus, who was standing nearby with his arms crossed.

"You're getting the hang of this," Hermann told him, causing Klaus to smile a little, which was something Hermann both noticed and liked. He liked the man standing next to him a lot more than he could allow himself to admit.

"Just let me know if I can be of any assistance," Klaus added.

Hermann didn't immediately respond to this. He just kept riffling through the furniture and closets and kitchen drawers. He checked everywhere but was getting nowhere, so eventually, after uttering a brief but accentuated sigh, he turned to Klaus and said, "Perhaps you can help me, considering you and Captain Gruber shared the same profession and had similar backgrounds and training. If you were him and wanted to hide something here, where would you do it?"

Klaus thought about this. He thought about it carefully as he glanced around the room. Finally, he pointed to the bureau by the bed and uttered: "I would use a secret compartment in that."

While nodding his head, Hermann marched up to the bureau, and he tossed all the clothes out of its five drawers, before kneeling down and feeling around the insides of them. But not finding a latch or anything like it, he tried knocking on the wood in various places, both inside the bureau and out, searching for some kind of hollowness. Which he found in the bottom of the middle drawer, and he took this out and glanced at, while feeling all around it.

"Well?" Klaus uttered.

"I can't figure out how to open it," Hermann told him.

"Let me try."

Hermann responded by turning to Klaus with the drawer, and Klaus stepped up to him and took it, and he broke it open with his fist.

"That's one way of doing it," Hermann said.

"It's the surest way," Klaus said back, before handing the remains of the drawer back to Hermann, who tossed away the broken pieces of wood, which exposed a small leather-bound book.

"What is it?" Klaus mumbled.

Hermann opened the book in response, and he read its opening paragraphs. He also scanned through some of the pages in the middle of it, while stopping in multiple places to read sections of it.

"Well," demanded Klaus, with a bit of agitation. "What is it?"

“Pornography,” Hermann answered, before tossing the book on top of the broken shards of wood. “And not even good pornography.”

Chapter 37

Major Fischer's one-bedroom apartment was much larger than Captain Gruber's place, so it took a lot longer for Hermann to find the same exact nothing. It took him nearly an hour. Even the search of Fischer's bedroom bureau was fruitless.

"Where else?" Hermann asked, right after giving up on this and rising to his feet.

Like in Gruber's flat, Klaus carefully looked around the room. But this time he shook his head, and Hermann started to leave.

"Now where?" Klaus asked.

"Back to the living room," Hermann answered, and Klaus followed him. Though he quickly came to a stop and uttered, "Wait."

"What is it?" Hermann asked.

Klaus responded by nudging his right foot up and down over a loose floorboard, and Hermann knelt in front of him as he removed his foot. Hermann further pried open the board, which took a little time, and after removing it he reached inside the crevice and felt around it.

"Well?" Klaus asked.

But Hermann just shook his head, and while removing his hand he said,
 “Sometimes a loose floorboard is simply a loose floorboard.”

“How about a little lunch before we go around in the same exact circle?”

“It certainly couldn’t hurt.”

With their heads hanging a bit, the two slowly left the apartment and the building. Right away, they noticed that they were only a few blocks from U Pinkasů, so they took a short walk and stepped inside the busy restaurant, where they both ate bowls of a thick and hearty garlic soup called *česnečka* while barely saying a word to each other. Though this didn’t mean that they weren’t thinking of anything.

Hermann was trying to figure out not only whether the case had reached a dead end but also whether it had really been leading him somewhere like he had earlier told Marta, or whether he had just been making himself believe it had so that he could justify his survival. At the same time, Klaus was wondering whether he’d be able to see the case to its logical conclusion and whether this conclusion would actually bring him the relief he desired.

But neither man’s thoughts were getting either of them anywhere, and all this thinking became tiring for both of them.

“Tell me,” Klaus said, after finally breaking the silence, “what do you expect to find in Fischer’s apartment that you didn’t find before?”

“Something I missed,” Hermann answered.

Quickly, the two finished their meals and left the restaurant, and they returned to Major Fischer’s apartment, and Hermann again started riffling through the same living room he had rifflled through before, finding the same nothing as before.

For a few minutes, Klaus just watched him. But he eventually started searching, too, just so he could do something. This searching brought him into the foyer, where he noticed a mirror hanging on the wall, which appeared to be just a bit crooked. So, he stepped up to it, and he removed it. But all he found behind it was a wall, and this caused him to sigh.

“It happens to the best of us,” Hermann told him, while looking in-between the cushions of a sofa. “You think you’ve finally stumbled onto the solution to the whole mystery, only to find that you have simply stumbled.”

Klaus shrugged, and after returning the mirror, he opened the nearby closet, even though this was the first thing Hermann had searched when they first arrived there. Like what Hermann had done, he searched the man’s jackets and coats, and he found nothing unusual or interesting in any of the pockets or anywhere else. So, he was about to close the door. But he stopped himself. He did when he noticed one of Fischer’s caps on the shelf above the coats.

After staring at the cap for many seconds, he pulled it off the shelf and looked it over. He looked at it carefully, and in the leather strap just below the skull and bones insignia he found something: a tiny scrap of paper, which he pulled out and opened. It was a coat check from an expensive restaurant in the Malá Strana section of town called U Malířů.

“You really do have the makings of an excellent detective,” Hermann told him, as he glanced at the coat check from right beside him. “It’s just a shame that we’ve already eaten lunch.”

Chapter 38

In the late midday sun, the Mercedes parked on Maltéžské Square, right in front of U Malířů, with Klaus dubiously glancing at the restaurant through the back window.

“It seems like a wild goose chase to me,” he told Hermann.

“It’s what I would call a ‘refined’ wild goose chase,” Hermann insisted. “I can tell you from experience that, if you go on enough of them, you often catch yourself a goose.”

“What makes it so refined?”

“You saw Major Fischer’s apartment. Did it look like it belonged to someone who frequents the most expensive restaurant in the city?”

“Nothing in his file would indicate it, either. His tastes seem to run quite the opposite.”

“But yet he was here.”

“So, he was here for some reason. I still don’t see what you expect to discover.”

“We might discover his dinner companions, and what they were discussing.”

“What makes you think that you’d discover what they were discussing?”

“Right before I got drafted into the army, I was working as a busboy at a restaurant in Uzhhorod that wasn’t that much different than this one. We even once served the emperor.”

“The one who pinned The Order of the Iron Crown on you?”

“His grandfather. Anyway, I was always amazed at how freely the patrons talked among themselves. It was as if they were eating at home and the staff weren’t there at all. I can tell you that the head waiter Mr. Szilágyi retired handsomely from all the investment tips he gleaned from working there.”

“We’re talking now about well-trained SS men, Hermann. Not drunken bankers.”

“Still,” Hermann said, as he opened his car door with Fischer’s personnel file in his other hand, “it’s our only lead.”

Forced to acknowledge this, Klaus opened his door, too, and the two stepped inside the restaurant, which was not only exquisitely furnished but also had works of fine art painted on its high vaulted ceilings.

“We’re not open, gentlemen,” the maître d’ told the two, while barely glancing at them, as he was busy accounting for the previous night’s receipts. “Not until 5:00.”

Hermann responded by walking up to the man, along with Klaus, and he opened the file he was carrying and showed the man Fischer’s photograph. He did this and said to him: “Do you recall serving this gentleman? It may have been more than a month ago.”

The maître d’ barely looked at the photograph and shook his head, and he said, “I can’t say that I recall him.” Though, with his eyes again focused on the receipts, he also pointed toward the kitchen doors and added, “Some of the staff are in there eating. You

can ask them if you want.”

Hermann nodded, and he and Klaus began making their way to the kitchen.

“Perhaps you should wait outside the doors,” Hermann told Klaus, while slowing down a bit.

“Why?” Klaus asked, as he slowed down himself.

“If you were them, would you be willing to openly talk about one SS officer in front of another SS officer?”

Klaus didn’t exactly answer this question. Instead, he sighed and grudgingly stepped to the side when they reached the doors. “You can listen to the whole conversation from here,” Hermann told him. “Just keep the door open a little with your foot.”

Klaus nodded, and Hermann stepped inside the kitchen.

“You can’t come in here,” one of the chefs immediately barked. A man who was eating with a half-dozen other employees at a large wooden table.

“It’s okay,” Hermann said. “The maître d’ just told me I could.”

“He did?” the chef uttered, while looking at Hermann’s appearance warily.

“It’s police business.”

“You’re a policeman?”

“I’m helping the authorities in an unofficial capacity. You can ask your boss if you’d like.”

The chef didn’t reply, and Hermann walked up to the table, and he showed everyone there the picture of Major Fischer while asking them: “Have any of you seen this man? We have reason to believe that he ate in this restaurant sometime in the past

month or so.”

“I remember him,” one of the waiters said with a slow nod. “I served him.”

“Was he with someone?” Hermann asked.

“Two other Nazis.”

“Can you describe them?”

“One was a big guy. Big and fat, and older than the other two. The other was real thin, and small, too. He also looked kind of weasel-like.”

“When was this exactly?”

“I don’t remember exactly. But Dita was still working here. When did she quit?”

“About three weeks ago,” the chef answered.

“Who’s Dita?” Hermann asked.

“Dita Prejslerová,” the waiter told him. “She was the coat check girl here, and the guy in the picture, he was flirting with her a lot. He was a real *sukničkář* that guy, if you know what I mean. He noticed every woman that came into the restaurant that night. But he especially noticed her. He was flirting with her every chance he got.”

“And she quit soon afterward?”

“Yeah.”

“Do any of you happen to know where she lives?”

They all shook their heads, but the waiter said, “You can ask Tomáš for her address.”

“Who’s Tomáš?” Hermann asked.

“The maître d’. He actually manages the place.”

“Tell me: do you remember anything else about the three men, like what they

were talking about that night?”

“I remember that they would clam up anytime I came within sight, like they were discussing some big secret. The guy in the picture, he also was really interested in what the big fat guy had to say. The whole night he was leaning over the table, like his whole life depended on what the fat guy was saying to him.”

“Thank you. You’ve been very helpful.”

“Say, what did this guy do?”

“That’s what I’m trying to find out.”

With that, Hermann bowed to everyone, and he left the kitchen, and outside the doors he said to Klaus: “Did you catch everything?”

Klaus nodded, and the two men marched up to the maître d’, and Hermann asked him about Dita.

“Who?” uttered the maître d’, who was still busy with the receipts.

“Dita Prejslerová,” Hermann uttered back. “She was a coat check girl here. She quit a few weeks ago.”

“She didn’t quit. She just stopped showing up. She didn’t even collect her last pay.”

“Can you give us her address?”

For the first time, the man gave Hermann and Klaus his full attention. He especially paid attention to Klaus and his uniform, and he mumbled, “I, I guess I don’t have any choice.”

“Your guess would be correct,” Klaus told him.

Chapter 39

When the maître d' told Hermann and Klaus that Dita lived on Dlážděná Street in the New Town section of the city, Hermann didn't think much of it. But as he and Klaus started getting close to the street, he suddenly realized that they would be driving right past an important and most unpleasant landmark of his immediate past.

Since the occupation, the place had been called the Hybernské Station. It was there, at what had previously been known as the Masaryk Station, that a train early one August morning took Hermann and hundreds of others to Theresienstadt.

As they approached the station in the Mercedes, Hermann tried not to look at the building or at its surrounding structures. He especially tried not to look at the train tracks. He looked in the opposite direction of all this. But he still saw the station, and he also saw the cattle car that he stepped inside nearly a year earlier.

That morning, the heat and humidity were oppressive. They were so oppressive that Hermann could barely breathe, and this was only made worse by the close proximity of so many others like him. Amid dozens of them, he stepped into the car carrying a single suitcase of his belongings in one hand and the crumpled-up pink deportation slip in

the other.

The people behind him pushed him forward. They pushed him toward the back of the car, guided by a pair of Nazi soldiers in front of it, who had their weapons draped over their shoulders, not expecting the slightest of problems.

Hermann resisted the pushing people, and he pushed back. He pushed his way toward the front of the car and kept pushing, so that he could look outside, in the direction of his home and where he imagined Ana was, and to keep doing this for as long as possible. But whenever he got close to the front, someone would always drive him backward. After it happened three separate times, he told himself that nothing was going to stop him from getting to the front of the car, and that if he had to he would even kill to make this happen.

He pushed and pushed, and finally he saw some daylight, and he rushed to the edge of the car. But instead of seeing the Prague skyline he saw something else. He saw himself in his apartment bedroom the night before.

There he further saw that not only was Ana sleeping on the featherbed beside him, but that it was nearly 3:00 in the morning and that he was fully dressed and ready to go, with a suitcase at his feet and a handwritten letter in his hand. The letter was his way of making it easier on both of them, but especially on him, and he placed it on her nightstand.

It said:

My dearest Ana,

No words can express all the things I want to say to you right now, nor can they make up for all the hurt that they will cause you upon reading them. For hours, I've written and rewritten this letter, but it never improves and never could. So, I'm just going to say it: the day that we have long known would come has come and I must leave you. But you shall not leave me. You'll be with me wherever I go. Wherever I go, I will go with the memory of you holding me up. I will never let go of it.

Hermann anguished for a long time over the text of this letter, but he anguished for far longer over how to end it. He knew that he had to end it in Czech, but he also knew that he couldn't say "farewell" to her. He couldn't use the word "*sbohem*." So, he didn't. The last thing he wrote her was: "*Na shledanou!*"

Until we meet again.

Quickly, he grabbed his suitcase and left their apartment, but as he tumbled out the front door of the building, instead of finding himself on Eliška Krásnohorská Street in the dead of the night, he finally reached the front of the cattle car. This is where he saw not the Prague skyline but something entirely unexpected. He saw Ana rushing toward him in the distance. He saw that their meeting again was to come much sooner than he had thought.

For a few seconds, he couldn't speak, or even react, as the sight of her was just too impossible to believe.

"Hermann!" she cried out, as she pushed her way through the crowd with a suitcase in her hand while rushing toward the train car.

Even before she had finished reading Hermann's letter, Ana had been looking for

him. It was then that it finally struck her just how much her life had become intertwined with his and couldn't be untwined. Without him, she was unable to control the basic functions of her mind and body, and she found herself gasping for breath, and she knew that she had to do something to change this, no matter what this something was.

Quickly, she packed a suitcase, and she threw on her coat and shoes. She also threw on a particular something else in the bathroom, and she hurried out of both her apartment and the building with the suitcase, and she ran to where she thought she would find Hermann: the former Wilson Station, which a few years earlier had been renamed by the Nazis the Main Station. But she couldn't find him there, so she rushed her way to where she was now rushing.

Finally, Hermann was able to speak. "No," he muttered, at a volume that he knew couldn't be heard. "Stay back!" he further screamed, just a little louder. "Stay away from the train!"

This last scream she heard, but she wouldn't listen. She was too far gone to stop now. She was no longer rational, and she continued hurling herself into the mass of people being pushed onto the train.

At first, the soldiers there pushed her forward as well. But when one noticed that she neither had a yellow star on her coat nor a pink slip in her hand, he grabbed her arm, causing her to cry out like a wild animal.

"You don't belong here!" he howled.

"I do belong!" she howled back. "This is the only where I belong!"

But he started dragging her away, and he soon after slapped her across the face with the back of his hand, trying to stop her from screaming and struggling so much.

Though this only intensified her struggling.

“You won’t!” she hollered, before clawing at his face with her fingernails. “You won’t take me from him! I won’t let you! I won’t!” While continuing to scratch the man’s face, she pushed him to the ground with one hand and rushed toward Hermann’s car yet again.

“What are you doing?” he yelled, still unable to completely comprehend what was happening. He was also frozen. He couldn’t make his body move.

“I’ll be with you,” she called out, as she reached the car and struggled to climb onto it with her suitcase, and with both a smile and tears pouring down her face she added, “I’ll be with you wherever you go.”

Though the soldier by now had risen to his feet and was quickly approaching the car, and furious at what Ana had done to him and the humiliation it had caused him, he removed his weapon from around his shoulder and jumped onto the car, and he slammed the butt of his rifle into the back of her head with the same kind of casualness he would’ve swatted a fly, and this knocked her lifelessly into Hermann’s arms.

“Ana!” he cried out, just as he caught her, while smelling the same perfume she had worn on their wedding day. But the soldier tore her away from him, and he pushed Hermann back into the crowd and onto the floor of the car, and the last thing he saw before they closed the car door was the man dragging his wife along the ground. He was dragging her as if she were debris that had been left in the road.

For Hermann, there was only one thing worse than watching this. It was his inability to do anything about it. He had saved a dozen strangers at Verdun, but he couldn’t save his own wife. All he could do was watch her die.

“Are you all right?” Klaus asked Hermann, right after the Mercedes stopped in front of Dita’s apartment building and he saw his former friend’s horrified face.

“No,” Hermann muttered, while feeling a burst of intense hatred toward Klaus that he couldn’t control. “I’m not all right.”

“Would you like something to drink? A beer? Or perhaps something stronger?”

“Let’s just get this over with.”

These weren’t just words to Hermann. He meant them. He wanted to finish the case as soon as he could. So, that he could finally face the same fate Ana had. He only hoped that he could do it as fearlessly as she had.

Hurriedly, the two men exited the car, and they entered the apartment building, and after passing through a rundown lobby, they found Dita’s apartment on the second floor, about halfway down the corridor from the stairwell. There Hermann, after sucking in a large amount of air in order to compose himself, knocked on the door.

But the only response came from down the hall.

“There’s nobody there,” spoke an elderly female voice.

Both Hermann and Klaus turned to the voice, and they saw an old woman dragging a small and empty shopping cart toward them.

“The girl moved out weeks ago,” the woman added.

“You don’t happen to know where she moved to, do you?” Hermann asked.

“I don’t happen to know.”

“What about the landlord?”

“He won’t be able to help you, either. She just left, right in the middle of the night. She didn’t even close the door.”

Hermann sighed a bit, and after the woman passed them on the way to the elevator, he and Klaus started down the stairs.

“Now what?” Klaus asked.

“I have an idea,” Hermann told him, and when they returned to the building’s lobby, he stopped in front of Dita’s mailbox. He also pointed to it and said to Klaus: “As Colonel Reidl told you last night, it’s not like you have to worry about getting in trouble with the law.”

Klaus nodded, and he took out the Ehrendolch dagger that all SS men carried with them, and with it he broke open Dita’s mailbox, which was overflowing with mail.

Hermann pulled this out, and he soon found a handwritten letter that had a return address from a Jitka Prejslerová, who lived in the Pankrác section of the city, many kilometers to the south.

“Do you think that’s her mother?” Klaus asked.

“It could be,” Hermann answered. “But I guess we’ll find out soon enough.”

Chapter 40

The Pankrác address of Jitka Prejslerová was nearly a twenty-minute drive from Dita's, but the building and the surrounding neighborhood were much the same, both working-class and dreary.

As soon as they parked outside of the building, the two men stepped out of the car and entered the crumbling structure, and they found Jitka's apartment on the third floor, just a little ways down the hallway, and Hermann knocked on its door.

No response came, so he knocked again, and he kept knocking until the door finally opened. It opened just a tiny bit, and Hermann peeked through the crack and could see a single eye staring at him.

"What do you want?" came the voice of an aging woman.

"We're looking for Dita Prejslerová," Hermann told her.

"She's not here. She, she hasn't lived here for a long time."

"Are you her mother?"

"She has her own apartment."

"She doesn't live there anymore."

“What do you want from me?”

“Any information that could help us find her.”

“All I can tell you is that she’s seeing some Nazi.”

“He’s dead.”

The woman didn’t reply to this. But her eye did widen a bit.

“You don’t know where she could be right now?” Hermann went on.

“I don’t know,” the woman growled, “and I don’t care. She has shamed this entire family.”

The woman didn’t even finish saying these words before she slammed the door shut, and she locked it, too, while fastening the deadbolt.

Both Hermann and Klaus responded to this. They did by starting down the hallway, toward the stairwell.

“Now what?” Klaus asked.

“Tell me something,” Hermann whispered, after coming to a quick but quiet stop just before the stairwell. “If a young lady were to call the palace and ask for Major Fischer, what would they tell her?”

“That he’s unavailable at the moment,” Klaus whispered back.

“Even if she insisted that they were quite close?”

“Even then.”

“And they would keep telling her this, no matter how often she called?”

“Yes.”

“So, it’s unlikely that she would know he’s dead.”

“Quite unlikely. I’d say that it’s next to impossible, especially as Fischer had no

next of kin, so no one was notified of his death.”

Hermann didn’t respond to this. He didn’t even move.

“Is there a reason why we’re still standing here?” Klaus uttered.

Hermann didn’t exactly reply to this. He just put his index finger over his closed lips, and the two men waited. They waited for nearly a minute. They waited until they heard a young woman cry out from inside the apartment, which reminded Hermann of his wife’s cry when the soldier grabbed her.

While trying not to think about this, Hermann stepped up to the woman’s door again with Klaus, and he again knocked on it. He did this and called out, “You’re going to have to let us inside, Mrs. Prejslerová.”

Chapter 41

The four sat at a kitchen table with cups of weak black tea in front of them: Hermann, Klaus, Mrs. Prejslerová, and her daughter Dita. The latter was a petite young woman with a pretty and angelic face, who had her dirty-blond hair tied back and whose mascara had been smeared by her tears.

“We’re trying to find out who murdered your boyfriend,” Hermann said to her.

“Husband,” she retorted, while wiping her eyes just a bit. “We were married just before he disappeared. You know, he actually told me more than once that he feared for his life. But I thought that it was just his nerves. I thought that the responsibility of marriage was too much for him, and that he had walked out on me. I had no idea . . .”

“I think you can help us find his killer. In fact, I think that you’re the only one who can.”

Dita shook her head at this, over and over, and she muttered, “I don’t see how.”

“Did he tell you why he had been spending so much time at the Klausen Synagogue?”

Dita answered by glancing at her mother.

“You are going to give us answers,” Klaus said. “Either —”

Knowing that this tactic would only be counterproductive, Hermann interrupted Klaus. He interrupted him by putting up his hand, and he said to Dita: “In no way are you or your family going to get into trouble for anything that your husband was involved in. Isn’t that right, captain?”

“Yes,” Klaus said, as softly as he could. “I won’t even mention your name in my report. My responsibility is simply to discover and apprehend those responsible for your husband’s murder.”

“And we can only do this,” Hermann added, “if we can understand the nature of the scheme your husband was involved in. It is very likely that your husband’s killer was involved in this scheme, too, somehow.”

“What do you want me to tell you?” Dita mumbled.

“You met Major Fischer while working at U Malířů, is that right?”

“He flirted with me when I took his coat. Actually, lots of men flirted with me when I took their coats. But he was different. He didn’t treat me like I was some dumb *blondýnka*, just because of how I look. And I’m not dumb. I went to Minerva.”

“A very good school. My wife went there.”

“I would’ve graduated, too, if it weren’t for the war.”

“My husband died a little while ago,” Mrs. Prejslerová interjected, while being careful not to tell them how or why he died. “He left us with no source of income, so I couldn’t afford the tuition anymore.”

“Max saw right away that I was smart,” Dita continued, with lots of pride in both her voice and expression. “On our first date, we discussed Hegel and Schopenhauer, and

Kant, too. He was impressed that I had written a term paper about Kant and his *Critique of Pure Reason*.”

“He and Kant were both from Koenigsberg,” Hermann said.

“They were even baptized in the same church,” Dita went on, with a big smile on her face.

All the talk about Kant caused Klaus to involuntarily think of something. A certain something that he didn’t really want to think about. He recalled the street that had been named after the man in Berlin. The one where The Eldorado club was located, where he was almost murdered, and this, in turn, forced him to look away a bit.

“If we could get back to the night at U Malířů,” Hermann said, “it’s our understanding that Major Fischer was there with two other men.”

“Colonel Reidl and his assistant,” Dita answered.

“Do you know Colonel Reidl?”

“Max told me a little about him later. After we got serious. He didn’t like the man at all, and he especially didn’t like the man’s assistant. He always told me that he didn’t trust either one of them and that he was only involved with them because he had no choice.”

“Did he talk to you about the dinner he had with Colonel Reidl at U Malířů?”

Dita nodded, and she said, “Max was not a perfect man. He told me this on our first date. He told me that he had some . . . some indiscretions with other women in the past and that he had gotten into a bit of trouble at work because of it. He also owed quite a bit of money. Anyway, he met this Colonel Reidl at some party just before we met and this man promised to make all of Max’s problems go away, especially his money

problems. That's why they were meeting for dinner that night."

"Just how was Colonel Reidl going to make all your husband's money problems disappear?" Hermann asked.

"He didn't tell me. He said that he couldn't, that he had promised to keep it a secret. But he said that we would soon never again have to worry about money."

"Did he often worry about money or talk about it?"

"Not really. I . . ."

"He once asked me," Mrs. Prejslerová interrupted, "he asked me if I knew someone who could buy valuables. I thought he meant a pawn shop or something like that, but he said that he needed someone who could buy very expensive things, such as fine jewelry and gold bullion and priceless heirlooms."

"And what did you tell him?" Hermann asked.

"That I didn't know anyone like that, which is the truth, and he never brought it up again."

Again, Hermann turned to Dita, and he said to her: "Did your husband ever mention any of his activities at the Klausen Synagogue? Even something that may seem to you as utterly insignificant could be an important clue."

"I don't recall him mentioning anything specific about what he was doing there," Dita insisted. "Like I said, he couldn't tell me what he was doing there. But . . ."

"But what?"

"He would often tell me how frustrated he was with the whole project, as he called it. Every night this frustration got worse, and it seemed that he came home later and later, until he didn't come home at all."

“You mentioned before that he feared for his life.”

“He thought something was watching him in the synagogue.”

“Something? Don’t you mean someone?”

“It’s crazy, but he thought there was, he thought there was a golem in the synagogue.”

Hermann and Klaus reacted to this by glancing at each other, but Hermann quickly spun back to Dita and asked, “Why would he think that?”

“He said that he would often hear loud footsteps when he was there at night,” she answered. “Footsteps he said that couldn’t possibly be human. He thought this golem was pursuing him in the building. He told me that every night it seemed to be getting closer to him. He even told me once that he saw it in the shadows. He said he saw a big giant monster. But like I told you, I thought it was just Max’s nerves. I thought that he was anxious about being married so suddenly and that this golem was just a manifestation of this.”

Hermann had no more questions for Dita, and he and Klaus thanked the women and left the apartment, and they slowly made their way down both the hallway and the stairs.

“You still think that a golem is preposterous?” Klaus asked, with his face expressing a fear that he couldn’t hide no matter how hard he tried.

“I still think it,” Hermann answered. “This is the twentieth century, Klaus, and I reside firmly within it. So do you. Besides, if there really were a golem roaming around Prague, I can tell you for certain that I wouldn’t be the last Jew in Josefov. The killer was just trying to scare Fischer away from whatever he was looking for. That’s all there is to

it.”

“So, how do we find out what Fischer was looking for?”

“That, of course, is the *klíčová záležitost*, as Czechs would say. The key to this whole mystery. But I have an idea about doing just that. I would like to go back to the Klausen, so I could ask Lieutenant Krieg some more questions.”

“I’m sure she’ll be overjoyed.”

Chapter 42

As fast as they could, Hermann and Klaus returned to the Klausen synagogue in the Mercedes, and as soon as they parked in front of it the two men jumped out of the car and strode toward the building.

“What will happen to Dita?” Hermann asked.

“I told her that I wouldn’t put her name in my report,” Klaus said, “and I meant it.”

“That’s not what I mean. Did you not notice how bare the cupboards in the kitchen were?”

“Do you really care what happens to the widow of an SS man?”

“Maybe I do.”

“Well, I have no idea if they were really married, but Fischer certainly submitted no notice of such a marriage to the SS, nor did he request its approval, which is what he would’ve had to have done. As far as we’re concerned, it never happened.”

Hermann made no response to this, and the men entered the building, and Lieutenant Krieg let out a big loud sigh the moment she saw Hermann step inside the

prayer hall. A sigh that echoed throughout the large and cavernous room.

“We won’t take up much of your time today, lieutenant,” Hermann insisted as he and Klaus approached her, while again trying to avoid looking directly at the woman or at the pictures on the wall.

“Very well,” she uttered. “What is it that you want to know now?”

“Did you ever have conversations with Major Fischer while he was here?”

“Infrequently, but from time to time.”

“Did he ever mention or ask about fine jewelry, gold, or heirlooms, or anything of that nature?”

Lieutenant Krieg thought about this for many seconds, before she uttered, “No, I can’t recall any conversations of that nature.”

Feeling suddenly deflated, Hermann was about to walk right out of the building. But he stopped himself. He did this and asked, “Did, did he ever talk with anyone else while he was here?”

“He often hollered at that idiot, not that I blame him.”

“Anyone else?”

Again, the lieutenant pondered Hermann’s question. She pondered it even longer than she had pondered his previous question, and she said, “There was this archivist who was here for a few days a number of weeks ago. If I remember correctly, Major Fischer spoke with him quite a bit while he was here.”

“An archivist?”

“He was helping me catalog various items. He’s an expert on Josefov and its history.”

“Do you remember his name?”

“Of course, I remember his name: Lieutenant Becker.”

“Do you know where we could find him?”

“At Černín Palace. That’s where he works.”

“Thank you, lieutenant. You’ve been of great help.”

At this moment, as quickly as the two strode into the building, they strode out of it, and once they came upon the late afternoon sun Hermann couldn’t help crack a bit of a smile. He also turned to Klaus, who said to him: “What’s so amusing?”

“It’s possible,” Hermann uttered, “it’s possible that the key to this whole mystery has been sitting in SS Headquarters from the very beginning.”

Chapter 43

Hermann and Klaus returned to the palace, and they found Lieutenant Becker in an office that looked much like Hermann's. What's more, it was only a short distance down the hall from his.

Becker was a man of twenty-five, who was tall with blond hair and blue eyes. He looked almost like a young version of Klaus, which was something that was not lost on either Klaus or Hermann.

Briefly, Klaus introduced himself and Hermann, and the latter showed the lieutenant a picture of Major Fischer before asking the man the same question he had asked Lieutenant Krieg: whether the major had ever asked him about jewels or gold or other such things while he was working at the Klausen Synagogue.

The lieutenant didn't have to think long to answer this, and he said, "He actually did talk to me about something like that. He wanted to know if I had ever heard any rumors of a Jewish treasure."

"A Jewish treasure?"

"He said that he had recently heard this rumor that related to a group of wealthy

Jewish families in Josefov who had pooled their resources together. According to him, they had collected a large number of valuables that they had hoped to use to facilitate their escape, but they never got the chance to use it. He said that this treasure, as he called it, consisted of fine jewelry, gold bullion, and antiques — many of which were priceless heirlooms. He wanted to know if, through my extensive research, had I ever heard of such a rumor.”

“Had you?”

“Never, and I told him so. I also told him that if there ever had been such a treasure that he could be assured that the Reich would have found it by now and would have properly taken care of it.”

“Thank you, lieutenant. You’ve been most helpful. You have no idea how helpful.”

With that, the two men left the man’s office, and they stopped a short distance outside its door.

“So, you think Major Fischer was looking for this treasure?” Klaus whispered.

“It seems to all fit, doesn’t it?” Hermann whispered back.

“Do you think this treasure is real?”

“I don’t know. But ever since the occupation began, I’ve heard rumors of such things.”

“I’ve heard them as well, and I’m sure Colonel Reidl has, too.”

“There were indeed quite a few wealthy people in Josefov. Some very wealthy. A treasure of a significant magnitude is certainly plausible.”

“We always thought people there were hiding some of their wealth, if not a lot of

it.”

“At least, I can believe in a set of murders driven by greed, and we now have a good idea as to why the men were found around synagogues, including Captain Weber. They must’ve thought the treasure was hidden in or near one of them. I bet each man was assigned to search a separate one. They may not have even known about the others. That way Reidl and Weber would only have to pay the man who found the treasure.”

“What do you suppose is Mr. Malý’s involvement in all this?” Klaus asked.

“If he is representing all those synagogues,” Hermann answered, “perhaps he’s also representing all those families as well. Perhaps with them now out of the way, he wants to take their treasure and needs Reidl’s help to get it out of the country.”

“Then, why would Reidl be looking for it?” Klaus asked.

“Maybe Malý doesn’t know where it is exactly,” Hermann answered, “or maybe he’s double-crossing him, just as Weber said he was.”

“But none of this indicates who the murderer is.”

“If we find the treasure, I think we’ll find that the murderer is not too far away.”

“And how do you propose we find the treasure?”

“There is only one thing we can do: follow all known suspects and hope that they’ll lead us to it. Fortunately, our list is short. You’re still going to have someone follow Malý, right?”

“I’ll call the Czech police as soon as I get back to my office.”

“What about Reidl? Are you willing to follow him, too?”

“I’m willing. But it would have to be us who does the following. I couldn’t have anyone else do it, for a number of reasons.”

“It would mean following him day and night continuously. Are you willing to do that?”

“Yes.”

“All right. We’ll need another car — something inconspicuous — so he doesn’t know that we’re following him.”

“We can start right after the dinner party,” Klaus said, after checking his watch and seeing that it was just after 4:30.

“You’re not really planning on bringing me to that dinner party, are you?” Hermann asked, with more than a little surprise, and lots of unease as well.

“Gertrude invited Reidl, too.”

Chapter 44

Klaus returned to his office. He did while telling Hermann that he'd come and get him at around 6:00.

Hermann nodded, but instead of returning to his own office he instead went to Marta's empty desk. There he opened the top drawer and took out the folded-over piece of paper that Marta had left him, which he unfolded right before reading the typewritten note that the woman had left him:

Herr Weiss,

First, I checked police records to see if we had a file on this Gertrude Gross. It turns out that we indeed did have a file on her, but that the Gestapo pulled it soon after the occupation, and no one could tell me why. Nor could anyone recall anything that was in the file.

Of course, I did not let this deter me. Because you said that the woman was a socialite, I decided to call Jiří Bezstarosti. He's the Society Editor at Lidové Noviny, and

he was able to provide me some details about her.

He didn't know much about the woman's background, but he said that she was married to Artur Gross, whose family not only has lots of money but plenty of royal blood as well. The man didn't need to work, but he was a senior deputy in one of the government ministries anyway, and he was well respected by both Czechs and Germans. According to Bezstarosti, in spite of Herr Gross' German heritage, the man was one of the most patriotic people he had ever met. He says that he was more Czech than most Czechs he knows.

Bezstarosti further told me that the couple lived at a beautiful and large villa in Vinohrady, and that they were known for giving some of the best parties in the city. He himself had been to a number of them and says that it was impossible to dislike either of them.

He also says that Herr Gross died soon after the occupation. But the circumstances of his death are sketchy. The most prevalent rumor is that he killed himself after learning that his wife was having an affair with Reich Minister Frank. But Bezstarosti is dubious of this, to say the least.

After her husband's death, Frau Gross sold the villa and bought a small building in Old Town, where she continues to hold lavish parties. An invitation to one of them is said to be prized among the Nazi elite. She is also known as someone who goes through men faster than the weather changes in the city, but Bezstarosti is as dubious of this as he is of her alleged affair.

Hermann finished reading this, and he tore the paper into shreds before dropping

these into a nearby garbage pail. He wasn't certain whether the information would be helpful to him or not, but he knew one thing for sure: he was now even more interested in the woman and was almost looking forward to the dinner party.

Chapter 45

Klara stared blankly through the front window of the boarding house from an easy chair, which was just a few steps from the glass. Though, unlike the day before when she was staring blankly at the river, there was no melancholy in her eyes. There was even a bit of wonder in them, and she had a good idea as to what the source of this wonder was.

Never did she imagine that a man could exhibit the gentleness Ivo exhibited the night before. For the first time in a long while she had met a man who didn't frighten her and make her recall the men she didn't want to recall. She didn't even mind his slowness or physical limitations, as these things just made him seem even more gentle.

"She's been acting strange ever since last night," Mrs. Jimelová said to Gertrude from the other side of the room. "I mean, even stranger than how she was acting when you first brought her here. She's either staring out into the street through that window over there or into the river through the window in her room."

"What happened last night?" Gertrude asked, after turning toward the woman.

"I found her roaming the streets of Josefov."

"Josefov?" Gertrude muttered, with lots of surprise. "Why would she be there?"

“I have no idea. I was babysitting for my sister who lives on Pařížská Street, and when I was walking home late at night I saw her talking to some odd-looking man.”

“Really? She’s barely said a word to me.”

“Me, neither.”

“It took me a long time just to get her name.”

“Well, anyway, I took her home right afterward, and that’s when the staring started.”

“At least, she looks a bit happier today.”

“Thanks to you, I’m sure.”

“I have a feeling that she’s been through something awful,” Gertrude said, after returning her attention back to Klara, while feeling her own awful moments coming back to her.

“What makes you say that?” Mrs. Jimelová asked.

“I just know. But maybe she’s starting to move past it at least a little.”

“Are you a relative of hers?”

“No. We just have a lot in common.”

“I would never figure that someone like you would have a thing in common with someone like her.”

“You’d be wrong.”

“Well, don’t you worry. I’ll take good care of her.”

“I know you will. I’m counting on it.”

Gertrude smiled at the woman, and she started toward the door, all the while staring at Klara. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Klara,” she murmured, with a bit of a smile.

Klara didn't respond and Gertrude left the building, and noticing Mr. Malý's car down the street in front of his office building, she thought for a moment about paying him a visit. But realizing that she had way too much to do that day, she instead jumped into her own car and drove home.

In front of this home, she parked, and she hurried up into her apartment with a wide array of shopping bags. She also again pretended. She pretended that her encounter with Klara that day hadn't affected her at all and that she was in control of herself, and that she was once more just another dumb socialite preparing for another vacuous night of fun.

"Mr. Malý has been calling you every five minutes," Kamča told her, the moment she stepped inside the door with her forced smile, which was just before Kamča took the bags from her.

"He can be awfully persistent when he wants to be," Gertrude told her back.
 "Which unfortunately isn't often enough."

"The way you juggle men, Gertie. I can't even handle one husband."

"I can assure you that it's nothing more than an optical illusion."

"If you say so."

"How are we looking for tonight?"

"There must be an entire deer in that kitchen. I have enough food cooking right now to feed a battalion."

"That's exactly what's coming tonight. Except that they are all officers, apart from the women, of course."

"There are going to be other women? I thought the men were coming just for

you.”

“Not all. Oh, and there will be one surprise guest as well.”

“And who would that be?”

“If I told you, it wouldn’t be a surprise, would it? How are we doing with booze?”

“I just restocked the liquor cabinet the other day.”

“We’ll need at least twice that much for this bunch.”

“I’ll call it in.”

She said this just as the phone rang, and she added, “Right after I pick that up.”

“I’ll get it. It’s likely for me anyway. Why don’t you just put those things away for me.”

“All right. I’ll call in the liquor order as soon as you’re done.”

“I don’t know how I’d get by without you.”

“Remember that when I ask for my next raise.”

“I’m already looking forward to it.”

Both women chuckled at this, and Gertrude marched up to the phone and picked it up, and she immediately recognized the voice on the other end of the line. A voice that sounded a bit frantic.

“So, where’s the fire this time, Tonda?” she asked.

“Your gentleman friend paid me a visit this morning,” he told her.

“Which one?”

“You have more than one?”

“Do you really need to ask such a question?”

“It was Captain Stamm, along with that Jewish colleague of his you mentioned. A

very fascinating man, to say the least.”

“You needn’t tell me that, either. But why were they visiting you?”

“They suspect me of murder.”

“Is that all? And here you had me worried.”

“They’ve also somehow connected me to certain entities in Josefov and to some unvoiced conspiracy related to them.”

“Hermann is indeed a fine detective,” Gertrude muttered, before hearing the front door open and close, and as she stepped toward a window facing the front of her house she added, “But I do hope that this won’t scuttle that big deal you’ve been working on.”

“It could very well affect it,” Tonda insisted. “Hence, the call. I wanted to get your expert advice.”

“Like I told you before, I think you should hasten that deal of yours. Hasten it as much as you can. Interestingly, both Klaus and Hermann will be here in an hour or so for dinner, along with a big VIP.”

“How big of a VIP are we talking about?”

“As big as they come.”

“You don’t know how badly I would love to join you.”

“I have a feeling that it’s going to be explosive enough without you.”

“Oh, well, I have a big day tomorrow.”

“So, tomorrow it will be, Tonda?”

“Tomorrow it will be. I’ve just decided, thanks to you, Gertie. Perhaps I’ll call on you early in the evening to celebrate after it’s complete.”

“I’ll be waiting, as they say, with bells on.”

Quickly, the two said their goodbyes, and Gertrude hung up. But she didn't move. She was still staring out the window into the street, where she saw Kamča talking to a Nazi officer in front of the house. She also saw the woman pointing right at Gertrude's unit, and this is when Gertrude began to wonder whether she had yet another problem on her hands.

Chapter 46

“You don’t need to know why,” spoke Klaus tersely over the phone, as he sat alone in his office at Černín Palace. “I want the man watched at all times, and I expect a written report detailing every moment of his whereabouts on my desk the first thing every morning. Is that clear?”

Klaus didn’t wait for a reply. He just hung up the phone and returned to the paperwork on his desk. He spent many minutes on this, making certain that it could not be reproached, and he finished it just a few minutes before a knock came on his door.

“Come in,” he called out, and a short and young lieutenant stepped inside the room with a set of car keys in his hand, which he gave to Klaus while saying, “The only thing they had available was a 1939 Škoda Popular. I parked it out front.”

“Do you have another set of keys?” Klaus asked.

“In my desk.”

“I want you to drive the car to Old Town Square for me, and then I want you to let me know exactly where you parked it.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes,” Klaus said to him, and he gave the man the paperwork he had been preparing.

“Dita Fischer?” the man uttered, after reading the name on top of the pension request.

“She’s the widow of Major Fischer.”

“He had a wife?”

Klaus made no response, and the lieutenant lowered his eyes and uttered, “I’ll make sure that this gets processed right away.”

“I have complete confidence in you.”

The lieutenant nodded and left the room, and Klaus turned in his chair to the Loreta Church in his office window and to the sun setting just behind it. With his weary eyes, he stared at the beauty of both of them while realizing that the climax of the whole affair with Hermann was quickly approaching. He further looked for the courage to not only set this climax in motion but also to complete it successfully without letting his conflicting feelings for Hermann get in the way. At the same time, he hoped to exchange a lifetime of failure, bad choices, and missed opportunities for the very opposite, where for the first time everything would go exactly the way he had wanted, or at least damn close to it.

Most of all, he hoped that when this was all over that he’d finally be able to sleep. Which was something that right now scared him so much that he didn’t dare shut his eyes, not even for a second.

Chapter 47

With lots of exertion and attention to detail, Ivo placed the heavy arched wooden door back into its frame, and he started replacing the hinges. This was a slow and tedious and strenuous task for him to do by himself, but he didn't mind. It was far better than the dull work he had been doing before the German soldiers had taken such an interest in the synagogues. This previous work consisted mostly of sweeping clean floors and polishing furniture that was already over-polished. But the work he was doing now made him feel needed, and in some small way important. He didn't even mind all the extra time he had to spend in and around the buildings, especially at night.

He only wondered where the Germans would make a mess that night. He knew that they had already stopped coming to the Maisel and to the Klausen and to the Spanish, and he strongly suspected that they'd now no longer be coming to the Pinkas as well. But there were still two other synagogues left and lots of other places in between them for the soldiers to lurk around in. He knew that he could still be busy for some time to come, and this made him smile.

Finally, he finished repairing the hinges, and after wiping his moist brow with his

shirt sleeve he replaced the door's lock as well, which he had spent hours repairing earlier in the day. Fixing mechanical devices was actually the one thing he did very well. The rabbi even once told him that God gave everyone a gift and that this was his, and he never forgot it nor did he ever cease feeling blessed because of it.

With the lock now properly in place, Ivo locked the door with the special iron key Rabbi Popper had given him just before he left the city, which locked and unlocked all the arched wooden doors in the synagogues and which the rabbi gave to him with strict instructions to never show it nor what was behind the doors to anyone else.

With his heavy work now done, Ivo cleaned the rest of the synagogue despite it not really needing cleaning, and he left the building just as the clock struck 5:00. He did so happy, happy that the day had gone by so quickly and that his favorite dish was patiently waiting at home for him to prepare. He further told himself that that night he would make himself an extra-large serving of potato dumplings, just in case the German soldiers kept him up as late as they had the night before and many nights before that.

There was also the small possibility that he might see the woman in the paisley shawl again that evening, and he knew that — even if he caught just a few glimpses of her — it would indeed be a special night. Which made him smile once more. A smile that was much bigger than before.

Chapter 48

Night had almost fully descended upon Old Town Square by the time the Mercedes parked on the north side of it. Slowly, Hermann and Klaus exited the car, with both knowing that a long night awaited them, and Klaus told the driver that he could go home. He further pointed to a small car parked up the road and said to Hermann: “That’s ours.”

“The Škodovka?” Hermann asked.

“Will it do?”

“It’ll more than do. What about Reidl’s car? Where is it?”

Klaus looked all around the square, including at Železná Street across from it, but he shook his head and said, “I don’t see it. Perhaps he hasn’t gotten here yet.”

“We better wait then. If he parks it on the other side of the square, we’ll never be able to follow him.”

“We could if we cut across the square.”

“I’m guessing that you’ve never furtively followed someone before. The whole point is *not* to be noticed.”

Klaus grudgingly nodded, and the two stepped into the car and waited. They waited silently for many minutes, with both men's minds on things much different than the task in front of them. Hermann once again was wishing that he was anywhere but there and where he was about to go, while Klaus's mind was again focused only on what would happen beyond the dinner party and well after that evening.

Before long, Reidl's Mercedes arrived, and it parked a short distance away on Pařížská Street, and the two men right away returned their attention to where it was needed. They did this while waiting for the colonel to lumber his way across the square and up Železná, at which time they began to follow him.

"You're likely to be very uncomfortable tonight," Klaus told Hermann, as they began crossing over the ancient cobblestones in the unseasonably warm air.

"You're not telling me anything I don't already know," Hermann told Klaus back.

"If it's any solace, I'm likely to be just as uncomfortable as you, if not more so, especially once Reidl gets a look at you."

"It's no solace at all, and I doubt there's anything that could bring me any."

"Just keep as invisible as you can and as quiet as you can," Klaus added, while purposely ignoring Hermann's last remark. "We'll leave at the earliest possible moment."

Hermann nodded, and they soon arrived at Gertrude's building, outside of which stood a large and well-armed security detail. So, it took the two some time before they could enter the building. But eventually they were at the woman's apartment door, which Kamča answered while smiling at Klaus. A smile that faded when she noticed Hermann. She actually wasn't sure what to think about him, and she just gaped at him silently, which was a state that was not particularly common for her.

“Who, who’s this?” she finally mumbled, right before realizing that Hermann must be the surprise guest Gertrude had told her about.

Klaus responded with Hermann’s name and indicated that Gertrude had invited him as well, and she quickly let the two men inside the unit. She also brought them into the large and crowded living room, where stood a handful of well-dressed women and nearly a dozen senior Nazi officers, including some who were very senior. One in particular shocked Klaus. It shocked him so much that his mind desperately tried to come up with some excuse for leaving at once.

Hermann felt something a little different than shock, and he felt it intensely. He felt rage. At first, he wasn’t sure what had brought on this feeling, as he had seen plenty of Nazis at the palace and at other places around town since his return to Prague without this feeling accompanying it. But he soon realized that it was the gaiety of the occasion that had upset him, along with how everyone was drinking to excess. It was one thing to be conducting a war. Hermann knew from experience that men could be made to do atrocious things under order and in the midst of battle. But here were men and women who were actually enjoying themselves, in spite of all the misery they were causing outside these walls.

Soon, Klaus and Hermann weren’t the only people at the party who were upset about the company they were keeping. Both the Nazis and their female companions had a strong negative reaction to Hermann the moment that they noticed him. Their reaction was even stronger than his, and they all fell silent. For many moments after this, all they did was glare at him.

“You people act as if you had never seen a Jew before,” Gertrude uttered with a

big smile on her face, as she swept inside the living room wearing an elegant strapless black gown that she had bought earlier that day. “It’s all right. He’s working with Captain Stamm, and I invited them both.”

This placated many of the guests at least a little, though their conversation and frivolity were far more muted than before, even if their drinking was not. But there was one guest who wasn’t placated at all: Colonel Reidl, who marched right up to Klaus and loudly whispered, “What do you think you are doing? Have you left your mind somewhere?”

“Gertrude invited him,” Klaus whispered back, even though he knew Reidl already knew this.

“So? Have you not heard of the word ‘no’?”

“It’s she who has a hard time understanding it.”

“How do you plan on explaining his presence here? Do you not see General Daluege standing just a few steps from you?”

“If the subject comes up, I’ll explain that Hermann’s a collaborator that is providing valuable services to the Reich, and that I cannot leave his side until these services have been provided.”

“And if they ask you in what respect he is providing these services, then what will you say to them?”

“Maybe, maybe I’ll tell them that he’s helping us track down some missing Jewish property. A treasure perhaps. One that would greatly enrich the Reich if it were found.”

Reidl didn’t exactly reply to this. But his face did become flush, and he scurried

off.

“I shouldn’t have said that,” Klaus mumbled to Hermann, just as soon as Reidl was out of earshot.

“It’s all right,” Hermann mumbled back. “A little fright just may cause him to do something rash tonight, which would almost certainly help us.”

“What are you two whispering about?” Gertrude asked, as she came between the two men and took each of their arms.

“I was just now asking Hermann a question,” Klaus murmured, while staring right at General Daluege.

“And what was that?” Gertrude murmured.

“My question was how could someone be stupid enough to invite him and me to a dinner party attended by a man who had just become the Deputy Protector for the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. A man who was effectively the absolute ruler of both the country and all our fates?”

“And what did Hermann say?”

“He had no more of an idea than I had. I’m only surprised not to see Reich Minister Frank here as well.”

Just the mentioning of this man’s name caused Gertrude to wince. But she quickly overcame this and smiled, and as she made her way toward General Daluege, she told Klaus: “I’m going to advance your career tonight, dear. Just you watch.”

Klaus did just this. He watched Gertrude stride up to the man as if they had been best friends since childhood.

“What am I going to do with her?” Klaus asked Hermann, while pointing at the

woman with his hand.

Hermann didn't answer. But much like the first time he met Gertrude, he felt an intense dislike toward her. At the same time, though, he was even more fascinated by her than he had been before, and he couldn't keep his eyes off her. Nor could he prevent himself from listening to all she had to say as she talked with the general.

"You certainly know how to make a scene," he told her, with a big grin on his long and narrow face.

"It's still early yet," she told him back. "The real scene will come later."

"I really should have you arrested for pulling this stunt. Or even shot."

"Then, you'd miss dinner, and trust me, you'd regret it."

They both chuckled at this, and Gertrude continued through the crowd. The party continued as well, and so did the heavy drinking, which only got heavier, and eventually everyone forgot about Hermann and they became just as giddy as before.

But when dinner came, they were forced to be reminded once again of him, and they were all hesitant to sit anywhere near him. Gertrude had to place Hermann at the far end of the table next to Klaus while she herself sat across from him.

As Klaus had warned, and as he had expected even before the man's warning, Hermann felt great discomfort sitting at the same table with these people and the thought of eating with them made him sick to his stomach. It made him so sick that he couldn't imagine that he'd be able to eat a thing. But this feeling quickly went away the moment Kamča served him a plate of her venison in a red wine sauce, as it was a dish that intoxicated Hermann on the very sight and smell of it.

"The sauce," Gertrude told Hermann, after noticing him gazing at the food, "is

made from the same wine you enjoyed last night.”

In response, Hermann tried a small bite of it, and he discovered that it was somehow even better than the venison at U Bilého Lva. Much better. Never had he tasted venison so tender and ungamelike. It was so good that it even made him swoon a little, and for the first time in a long while he found his appetite, and he devoured everything in front of him. Like many others there that night, he even had a second serving, during which he forgot all about the company he was keeping. There was only the food and how it made him once again enjoy being alive.

Though, just as he finished eating, his discomfort returned. It returned with even more gusto than before. The silence among the guests also returned at about the same time. Almost everyone at the table looked uncomfortable. The only exception was Colonel Reidl, who was looking as if he were somewhere else.

Tiring at all the silence, the middle-aged woman sitting next to Gertrude glanced at the cause of it before turning to Gertrude and proclaiming, “It’s just amazing how distinguishable Jews are, don’t you think so, my dear? I mean, I swear I could spot one from blocks away, as easily as I could spot a rat.”

“Now that wasn’t very nice,” Gertrude told her, with a forced grin. “Hermann’s a guest here, and he’s obviously on our side, or he wouldn’t be working with Klaus. Is that not true, darling?”

“I wouldn’t exactly say that he’s on our side,” Klaus answered.

“I can attest to that,” Hermann told her.

“Then, what are you doing with him?” Gertrude asked.

“He’s helping us sort out an investigation,” Klaus said. “An investigation that

only he could sort out, as a man who was once one of the best police detectives in the city.”

“Even Protector Heydrich,” General Daluge interjected, “who was certainly no lover of Jews, had relationships with a number of them.”

“Is that so?” Gertrude uttered, with lots of surprise.

“More than once I had dinner with him and Paul Sommer, the champion fencer. Heydrich always believed that you could isolate certain exceptional Jews from the race as a whole. After all, even an individual rat can be exceptional. So, it doesn’t surprise me that Captain Stamm would want to make use of an exceptional Jewish police detective if it would further the ends of the Reich. I commend him, in fact, for both his ingenuity and boldness.”

“And how’s that case coming, dear?” Gertrude asked Klaus.

“The case is approaching its climax,” Klaus answered. “I’m hopeful that it will be resolved presently.”

“What about you, Hermann?” Gertrude uttered, after turning to him.

“What about me?” he uttered back.

“Why are you helping us?”

“Let’s just say,” Hermann muttered, “they made me a compelling offer.”

“Don’t you hate us?” Gertrude cooed.

“What do you mean by ‘us’?”

“Germans, of course.”

“I don’t hate all of you. For example, I don’t hate Hegel or Schopenhauer or Kant. I actually admire all of them.”

“Ah, Hegel. I’ve long admired him and his dialectics. What a charming concept that is.”

“Isn’t that a Marxist concept?” the woman next to Gertrude uttered.

“You’re thinking of dialectical materialism, my dear,” Gertrude uttered back, after putting her hand on the woman’s wrist.

“Oh.”

“Hegelian dialectics describe the development of things. You see, first you have a thesis: an instance of something. This party, for example. Countering this is an antithesis. Hermann stands as the antithesis to everything this party represents, and the synthesis is the outcome of the thesis and the antithesis reacting. In our case, we are right now experiencing an actual synthesis in progress.”

“How interesting.”

“But tell me, Hermann,” Gertrude went on, “are there any *living* Germans you don’t hate?”

“Even some of those I don’t hate,” Hermann said, while thinking of someone very close to him. A certain someone who could infuriate him and enrage him, but never for long. “I can’t hate them regardless of how much I want to hate them.”

“You know, I bet if we turned off all the lights right now, we wouldn’t even know you were Jewish.”

Involuntarily, Hermann smiled at this, which confused Gertrude, who said, “Did I say something funny?”

“It’s just that I used to wish the very same thing,” Hermann said to her back. “I wished that people would somehow not be able to see my face and all its features, and

that they would only be able to notice the man underneath it. I actually did everything I could do to make this happen. Every choice I made in life was to facilitate this. You see, I didn't choose to be Jewish. I didn't even want to be Jewish, any more than I chose or wanted to be left-handed."

"But Jewish you are."

"Jewish I am. And do you want to know what? I've stopped being ashamed of it, and at how I look. I stopped the moment I stepped inside Theresienstadt. The very moment itself. It was then that I was finally forced to accept who I am. And I've since discovered something even more remarkable: I actually like who I am. I'm even proud of it."

Again, the conversation fell silent, and everyone looked even more uncomfortable than before. A few even made gestures to suggest that they were getting ready to leave, including General Daluege.

Desperate to breathe life back into her party, Gertrude told the woman next to her: "Klaus and Hermann are actually old friends."

"How interesting," the woman told her back, while gazing at Klaus with a look that combined both surprise and suspicion.

"We were roommates in college," Klaus mumbled. "For a short period of time."

"And then you found out he was Jewish," Gertrude asserted.

"No," Klaus insisted.

"Then, what happened between you two?"

"It's an old story. One that is best forgotten."

"Last night, Hermann, you mentioned a wife. Where is she?"

“She passed away,” Hermann said.

“I’m sorry. Did it happen at Theresienstadt?”

Hermann shook his head. He shook it and said, “She wasn’t even Jewish. She could’ve lived a life mostly unaffected by you and others like you. She suffered all she did, and she suffered a lot, all for my sins alone.”

“Can we please change the subject,” Klaus demanded.

“To what?” Gertrude asked.

“To you perhaps,” Hermann answered. “Perhaps we can talk about you.”

“Me?”

“You know all about me, and I know almost nothing about you, other than that you are utterly charming.”

“Well, you know what that Heisenberg fellow said, don’t you? The more you know about one aspect of an object the less you can know about all its other aspects. The same applies to people, I’m afraid. Besides, I’m actually rather uninteresting.”

“I rather doubt that.”

“I’m just your average brainless socialite living off my family’s money.”

“I don’t know too many brainless people who can not only articulate Hegelian dialectics and Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle but also make them easily understandable for the average person.”

“I picked them up from a former lover. He was a rather boring man as you can imagine, but he had his usefulnesses.”

“She’s actually quite brilliant and knowledgeable,” Klaus said. “I know many officers who are less informed about the war. And I can assure you that this information

wasn't gained through osmosis."

"I'm just naturally curious, that's all."

"She's also helped me more than once with the local business leaders. She's invaluable actually."

"And she knows everyone," interjected the woman next to Gertrude. "She was even on a first-name basis with Protector Heydrich. Didn't you have dinner with him just before that ill-fated trip of his?"

"Hmmm," Hermann murmured, while gazing at Gertrude as if a veil had just come off her face, "with connections like that, I bet you could open lots of doors."

This remark caused Klaus to glare at Hermann, which Hermann noticed at once. But he chose to ignore it, and he continued gazing at Gertrude while Klaus stewed. He not only stewed but at the same time all his old feelings about Hermann began bubbling to the surface without control.

"What dinner was this?" General Daluege asked Gertrude.

"The dinner was actually well before his, his mishap," Gertrude answered. "And it wasn't a private dinner or anything of the kind. It was a state dinner in celebration of the visit of Grand Mufti Husseini. We were barely in the same room together. I think you were even there."

"Ah, yes. I remember now."

The conversation's sudden turn piqued the interest of Colonel Reidl, and he turned to Hermann and said, "Being that you were in Theresienstadt, I guess you didn't hear what happened to our dear beloved protector, who governed your nation with such a gentle hand."

“I actually did hear about it. I heard all about how he was gunned down, in daylight, no less. On the road to Berlin, wasn’t it? Everyone in Theresienstadt heard about it, and to be perfectly honest we all went to bed with smiles on our faces for many nights afterward. Though then, then we heard what you did to Lidice in response to his killing.”

“A little town that no one will ever miss, along with its people.”

This last comment made Gertrude squirm more than just a little. She squirmed in her seat and growled, “Well, they certainly learned their lesson, didn’t they?”

With Gertrude now looking even more uncomfortable than him, Klaus took this as a sign to leave. He did so quickly and with Hermann in tow, and Gertrude led both men toward the door and through it.

“Goodnight, darling,” she said to Klaus in the doorway, before hurriedly kissing him, with Hermann standing by the side of the door and crossing his arms while looking as far from the two as he could.

“Goodnight,” Klaus said back. “Please don’t keep Colonel Reidl up too late. He’s got a lot to do.”

“He’s not the only one.”

She said this and closed the door, and Klaus marched angrily down the corridor followed by Hermann.

“Don’t think that I didn’t catch the insinuation of Gertrude you made in there,” Klaus barked, while fighting the urge to shoot Hermann then and there.

“It wasn’t an insinuation,” Hermann insisted “It was only an observation.”

“It was nonsense.”

“You must investigate a crime objectively, Klaus. I’m not accusing her of anything or even calling her a suspect. I was simply making an observation.”

“I would suggest that you leave her out of your observations,” Klaus told him as he started rambling down the stairs. “That is, if you want to keep being able to make them.”

Chapter 49

Hermann continued following a still seething Klaus as he marched to the car, and he watched Klaus swing open the driver-side door.

“You better let me drive,” Hermann told him.

“Why?” Klaus growled.

“Do you not remember when I asked you if you had ever followed someone without being noticed?”

Klaus answered this with a loud sigh. He also stormed around to the other side of the car, and when he passed Hermann along the way he dropped the keys into his hand without saying a word and without looking at him. He did this and stepped into the car through the passenger-side door while Hermann got into the driver’s seat, and they both started watching the square.

“We’re going to be doing a lot of waiting, I suppose,” Klaus uttered.

“Your supposition is right,” Hermann uttered back. “Detective work can be very boring, and this is as dull as it gets.”

“How do you pass the time?”

“We can talk if you’d like.”

“About what?”

“Anything you’d like. For instance, I don’t know, you could tell me what you’ve been doing with yourself since that little blow up of ours. Well, I guess it wasn’t so little.”

“You don’t care,” Klaus muttered, with his eyes lowered a bit.

“You’re wrong,” Hermann insisted, before turning even farther from his former friend. “I’ve often wondered what happened to you. Ana, too, wondered. She told me so more than once.”

“I never graduated from Charles.”

“Neither did I.”

“What was your excuse?”

“Ana got pregnant unexpectedly. The funny thing was that everyone thought that this was the reason we moved the wedding date up. But she actually got pregnant just after we got married, and I had to take a job with the police. It was the only thing I was qualified to do.”

“You have a child?”

“He was stillborn.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Me, too. I was planning to return to school afterward, just like we were planning to have more children, and just like I was planning to finally take Ana to Bled like I had promised her. But none of these things ever happened. It’s amazing all the things you put off while telling yourself that there will always be time to do them. What about you?”

“Me?”

“What was your excuse for leaving Charles?”

“I didn’t exactly leave. I was asked to leave. There’s a reason why I drink milk with all my meals.”

“And?”

“And what?”

“What have you been doing the past 20 years?”

“That’s a good question.”

“You don’t know?”

“Mostly not. There are flashes of memories, but I really can’t tell which ones are real and which are distorted. There were years in which I’m not sure if I was ever fully sober. I only became so when I awoke one morning in a jail outside Dresden. It was sometime in early 1936, I think. It was cold outside. I remember that. I also remember being told by a local party leader when he visited me in my cell that I was single-handedly diluting the strength of the great and magnificent Aryan race, and that I could either cease this on my own or the Reich would do it for me.”

“So, they gave you a similar choice as to what you gave me.”

“I chose similarly as well.”

“But how’d you end up in the SS?”

“I needed a job, just like you did, and when they found out about my military background, they were all too willing to offer me a position in the army. One thing led to another, and then to another after that. Once you start rolling down a hill you will likely keep rolling.”

“But why the SS?”

“Why not the SS? Why shouldn’t I be more respected and better paid than all the others who commit the same exact atrocities? It was an easy choice.”

“Easy? It was easy to become a monster?”

“Surprisingly so. You can’t even imagine how easy. All you need to become a monster, as you call it, is for someone to tell you that you are above the rules of right and wrong, and for them to pat you on the back after breaking them, while each time telling you how good a job you are doing. With proper affirmation, we are capable of anything.”

“Even braining a defenseless woman with a butt of a rifle, and dragging her body down the sidewalk like she was garbage.”

“Even that. Just as long as someone tells you that it’s okay. That it’s good, even. And don’t think for a second that it’s just Nazis and Germans that this works on. It could work on anyone. Even you.”

“No.”

“You think so now, but just wait until you’ve committed your first murder and realize just how meaningless it is. When you realize how there are no repercussions for it and no remorse. Just wait until you realize that life and death are just different states of the same rotting, and that truth and lies are just different turns of the same phrase.”

“Speaking of lies, those papers in your pocket, the ones that were supposedly from the highest echelons of the SS. They don’t really exist, do they?”

Klaus didn’t answer, but this was the only answer Hermann needed, and he smiled at it. He smiled broadly and said, “It’s all right. I guessed the truth from the moment you made me the offer, but I was certain of it when you told me that I needed to

keep quiet about this whole case. If you wanted me to keep quiet then, you'd surely want me to keep quiet always."

"So, why'd you ask?" Klaus growled.

"Maybe I wanted to hear you 'turn the phrase,'" Hermann growled back.

"Listen to you talk so righteously," Klaus snarled, with his old hatreds of Hermann finally overwhelming him, "like you're so much better than me. Were you truthful with me? How long were you seeing Ana behind my back?"

"The difference was that I wasn't trying to hurt you, nor was I being indifferent to you. It was the exact opposite."

"You stabbed me in the back, like the black-hearted Jew you are."

"You never loved Ana."

"How would you know?"

"Because I know who you really loved. We both know."

"What are you trying to say?" Klaus howled, after grabbing the lapels of Hermann's jacket.

"You know exactly what I'm trying to say!" Hermann howled, with even more anger than Klaus expressed. He, too, could no longer hold back his own rage, and no longer did he care where it would lead him, even if it meant complicity in his own death.

Klaus reacted to Hermann's words by thrusting him against the door, and he hollered, "I could kill you right now! It would be so easy! I wouldn't even need a pat on the back or a good word afterward!"

"So, do it! I'm not stopping you! Do it!"

Instead, Klaus released Herman. He released him and hollered, "You only want

me to do it because you're too cowardly to do it yourself!"

This caused Hermann to lower his eyes a bit, which he did while wondering if what Klaus was saying were true. He wondered if the promise he had made to Ana to not give up was nothing more than a way to mask his own fear of dying.

"Ana," Klaus went on, "she at least had the courage to control her own fate, instead of living in fear of it."

Suddenly, Hermann started falling apart, and while recalling not only Ana's actions at the train station but the lack of his own, he silently and tearlessly wept, not just for her but for himself, too.

"Look at you," continued Klaus, with a sneer that let loose more than 20 years of build-up contempt. "Just look at you: the hero of Verdun, nothing more than a sniveling coward. Ana would be ashamed of you. She'd be ashamed of you!"

Just as suddenly as Hermann fell apart, he began to roar. He roared both in and out, and he turned to Klaus and punched him as hard as he could in the face with his left fist, knocking him back against the passenger door.

"You can take anything you want from me, Klaus," he screamed. "Anything you want, including my life. But I won't let you take my memories of her. I won't!"

Klaus tried to fling his own feeble punch in reaction to this, but Hermann easily blocked it, and he started pounding Klaus's face with a flurry of punches, which sent Klaus's hat to the floor and his blood down his face. But not even seeing the latter could diminish Hermann's fury. If anything it drove him even wilder, and he began hitting Klaus everywhere at once.

Like the night outside The Eldorado club in Berlin, Klaus could've easily

defended himself and stopped the onslaught, but like then he was enjoying it too much to do so. He wanted Hermann to keep pummeling him and to finish the job that the two men were unable to complete. He wanted Hermann to destroy both him and everything about him he hated.

Hermann only stopped punching when he heard a sound. He heard Reidl's Mercedes start nearby, and he looked in the rearview mirror, where he saw the car beginning to back out of its spot.

"So, are you going to shoot me or are we going to follow him?" Hermann demanded, as he watched the Mercedes start to leave.

Klaus didn't answer. He just sat there by the door looking dazed, with blood dripping down onto his pristine black uniform.

"Well?" Hermann cried out, while staring at the Mercedes as it passed their car. "What do you want me to do?"

Klaus thought about this. He thought about it as hard as he could before mumbling, "Follow it."

Hermann obeyed. Quickly, he started the car, and even more quickly he backed it up, and a moment later he fired it forward down the road, just as Klaus reached inside his jacket. He reached inside it for a handkerchief.

Chapter 50

Colonel Reidl's Mercedes steadily drove along Dvořák Quay as the road hugged the riverbank. It did this while Hermann and Klaus followed it in the Škoda more than a block behind.

Eventually, the Mercedes came to a slow stop at the foot of Mendel Bridge, which before the occupation had been known as Čech Bridge, and Hermann pulled over to the side of the road a good distance back. There, from inside their car, the two men watched the colonel slowly step out of the back door of his Mercedes and lumber toward the edge of the bridge, where he looked around the area while deep in thought.

The man at this moment tried to convince himself that everything he had planned was not lost, in spite of Klaus's remark at the party and in spite of all the dead men who had been left in the wake of him carrying out these plans. He was still around and kicking, and that was all that mattered to him at all times. That and his continued doing so after the war, which was something he had known for a long time was lost. Even before knowing this, it never mattered to him who actually won or lost, just as long as he wasn't

among the latter. He had been there before and was determined to never return. Also, there was the matter of a number of actions he had been involved in during this particular war. Actions that could easily be construed as serious war crimes under the right optics, and he knew that to hide from these types of optics would take money. Lots of it.

With this in mind, Reidl watched a huge barge crawl up the river with a heavy load on its deck, and he felt himself traveling along with it.

Both Hermann and Klaus watched the man as he did this, and slowly their anger at each other began to fade. It kept doing this until all that was left of this anger was its hollow shell.

“What’s he doing?” Klaus asked, while covering one of his swollen eyes with his hand.

“Something tells me that he’s not admiring the view,” Hermann answered.

The colonel continued his staring. He did this even after the barge was long gone. Now, he was staring at the quiet river below and the quieter docks beside it, with his mind as empty as them. He stared at this for many minutes before reluctantly returning to the back seat of the car, which soon again made its way down the quay.

Hermann, though, didn’t even start the car.

“What are you waiting for?” Klaus uttered.

“I don’t want the driver to get suspicious of me,” Hermann told him. “He might already be.”

Hermann waited until Reidl’s Mercedes was completely out of view. At which time he started the car and started down the road. Though the very moment the Mercedes came back into his view he made a sharp left down Břehová Street.

“Now what are you doing?” Klaus demanded, after turning to Hermann in surprise.

Hermann didn’t answer. Instead, he made a quick right onto Sanytrová Street.

“I asked you a question,” Klaus growled.

“They’re likely driving straight down the quay, to at least Mánes Bridge Road,” Hermann told him. “But the driver’s only other options are making a left down either Na Rejdišti Street or Rejdiště Square, and if he does either of these things, he’ll have to drive right in front of me. There are no other possibilities besides stopping, and if he does that, we’ll find them soon enough.”

Just as he said this, Hermann sped right onto Mánes Bridge Road, and both men at once could see Reidl’s car up the road as it finished making its own right onto the street. They also saw the car mix within the light traffic that was heading toward the bridge, and they again followed it as it began crossing the river. They followed it a safe distance back, with a trio of cars in between them.

“This is how you follow someone in Prague without being noticed,” Hermann said to Klaus, as he glanced at him while their own car crossed the water. “By always being ahead of them.”

“If only you weren’t Jewish, Hermann,” Klaus said back, while shaking his head in wonder. “We’d really be able to use a man like you in my office.”

“Yet another reason to be thankful for being Jewish.”

Hermann continued following Reidl. He followed him as the man’s Mercedes wended its way into Malá Strana, driving through a set of winding old streets, with Hermann making use of the same techniques and maneuvers that he had so effectively

used on the quay to elude detection of those inside the Mercedes.

Eventually, Reidl's Mercedes reached a cobblestone road called Tržiště, and it followed this road even as it veered right into a narrow outlet. Hermann, though, continued straight on to Břetislavova Street, where he both turned around and stopped by the edge of the outlet.

This time, Klaus didn't even ask Hermann what he was doing. He just gave him a look that expressed it.

"Tržiště is a dead end up there," Hermann told him, while nodding up the road. "If he's coming out, he has to come right back where he came from."

But Reidl didn't come back.

"Is there a reason why he would be stopping somewhere over there?" Hermann asked, after they waited for more than a minute.

"This is not where he lives," Klaus answered. "I can tell you that much. But perhaps his mistress lives here. I know he has one, but I know nothing about her. Not even her name."

"Then, we could be here awhile."

"Or maybe not."

"You want me to take the first watch?"

"I'll do it."

"Wake me in a few hours."

Hermann said this and closed his eyes, and sleep quickly overtook him. Though this didn't mean that he was going to get any rest, and the same was true of Klaus.

Chapter 51

Klaus was far more tired than he had imagined. After Hermann fell asleep, for many minutes he struggled to keep his eyes open. He tried to do anything but fall asleep. But eventually his eyes closed, and sleep overcame him much the way it had with Hermann. Along with this came the nightmare that he was all-too familiar with. The nightmare that he had been trying to escape.

Much like all the versions of it he had experienced, he was running. He was running through the darkened streets of Josefov, chased by some unseen and unknown assailant. He could hear the man's breathing and his heavy footsteps, but he couldn't see him, even though he could tell that he was close by and getting even closer. He also somehow knew that if this person caught him, it would be the end of him.

While he had long encountered these happenings in previous dreams, this particular version of it was a little different. He was now moving deeper within the twisted streets of the district than he had ever done before. At the same time, he noticed both streets and street names that he did not know. The buildings, too, seemed different from the ones he knew. They were different from both the ones in earlier dreams and

from those he knew in the real world. The whole district seemed older, too. Older even than how he remembered it in college. Centuries older.

In this Josefov, there was a lot more streets and buildings and they were all crowded together. The buildings seemed as if they were almost crouched on top of each other, and many of the signs on these buildings were in Yiddish, which was something that he had never seen before in the city. He could also see old men in black hats and suits. Men with long gray beards, who were peering at him through the windows as he passed.

Klaus kept running. He ran as fast as he could. He ran until he reached a road from which there was no exit. This caused him to stop and turn around, and he saw that there was no exit going back, either, or any exits anywhere in between. It was a dead end in every direction. This caused him to look up at the nearby street sign, and he saw that he was on Ztracená Street. The Street of the Damned. The street he and Hermann had jokingly searched for that drunken night when they were college students. But now he was sober and now it was no joke.

Frightened, Klaus started backing up. He did this while realizing that no one was chasing him anymore. Still, he quickly kept moving. He moved right into a wall, and at once he could feel the bricks crumbling behind him. With this, the whole wall started to fall, and it didn't take long before the entire building was crumbling to the ground all around him.

Once again, he could hear the footsteps. They were now coming from directly behind him, and they were slower but far heavier than before, and he spun toward them. This is when he finally saw who had been chasing him through the countless incarnations

of the same dream. He saw himself. Though it wasn't exactly him. It was a gruesome caricature of him, with distorted facial features and skin that was rotting. It was rotting so badly that it was beginning to drip all over his clean black uniform.

“What do you want from me?” Klaus cried out, while trying to back up through the rubble.

“I haven't come for you,” the man insisted, just as Klaus tumbled to the ground.
“I'm running from you.”

Chapter 52

Hermann, too, thought he was dreaming. This was because he not only found himself walking into the setting sun but because he was walking toward his old family home in the shtetl where he lived as a boy. On both sides of the path he was on were tall stacks of snow, over which he could barely see. Though he was still able to see both the black smoke churning from the house's chimney and Mr. Jacobs from next door, who was smiling and waving at him in front of his freshly shoveled walkway.

"Thank you, Hermann!" the man called out.

Hermann didn't reply. He just stepped into his house.

"Hermann?" came a familiar female voice from the kitchen.

Hermann followed this voice. He also followed the smells and the crackling sounds of chicken and potatoes roasting in the oven, and he found his mother not far from this oven, lighting the Shabbat candles. She did this right before guiding the light from the candles into their home with her hands.

This was a ritual that Hermann always liked. It was one of the few religious rituals he did like, from the time he watched it as a boy through seeing it performed every

Friday night at Theresienstadt. The gentle waves of his mother's hands particularly fascinated him now, and for just a moment he thought that she really was bringing God upon them as she recited the prayer:

Barukh ata Adonai

Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam,

Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav

V'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

As the woman finished singing this, she turned to Hermann, and with a big smile on her plump face she cried out, "Next year in Jerusalem, Hermann! Next year we will welcome the Sabbath in Jerusalem!"

Hermann said nothing in response to this. He only recalled how his mother had said this every Sabbath night, and he wondered why he would be dreaming of it now when he couldn't recollect ever dreaming of it before, or even thinking about it.

Not being able to come up with an answer to this, Hermann continued farther into his old home, and he soon came upon the door to his old bedroom, which he opened and stepped inside. This led him into his well-furnished Prague apartment, where he was wearing the same suit that Mr. Jacobs had made him, which no longer fit him as well as it once did due to the beginnings of a belly that he was developing just before the occupation.

Again, Hermann thought he was dreaming. But at the same time he wondered if it really were a dream he was having, as he had never experienced a dream in which he

actually thought that he was dreaming. Still, he went deeper inside the unit and strode into the kitchen. There he saw, in the bright midday sun, Ana in her flowered apron preparing another of her jars of *utopence*. She was doing this by chopping onions on a big wooden carving board.

Carefully, she cut each onion. She cut them as if how they were cut actually mattered, and once this was done she emptied them into the jar, which seemed to have no room to spare for anything else.

It all seemed so real to Hermann. He could smell not only the odor of the food, but also Ana's perfume. The kind she only wore on special occasions, such as on their wedding day and on the day she tried to join him in Theresienstadt. He could even feel the warm summer sun upon his cheeks and forehead. But more than this, he could feel the warmth of again being in Ana's presence, and he marveled at how she could inspire him after so many years of marriage.

Hurriedly, he rushed up to her, as if he were afraid she might disappear otherwise, and he took hold of her hands, which were even warmer than the feelings that she had evoked in him.

"It'll be just another few days," she insisted, as she removed her hands from his so that she could close the lid of the jar, which she did tightly. "Surely, you can hold out till then."

"I can't even hold out for a few more seconds," he told her, before grabbing her hands again and gently dragging her away.

"Are you being naughty, Herr Weiss?" she asked him, while playfully dragging her feet.

He answered by sweeping her into his arms, much as he had done on their wedding day when they first stepped into the apartment as husband and wife. Like then, he spun her around in circles as they both giggled. He spun her right into the bedroom.

But instead of finding themselves in there, they found themselves by the Church of the Assumption on Bled Island, in front of the 99 steps that led all the way to the entrance.

With a big grin on his face, Hermann started carrying Ana up the stairs, who was once again wearing her wedding dress and gripping her flower bouquet.

“What are you doing?” she cried out.

“Ssshh!” he cried back, before rushing back down the stairs to the bottom. “Don’t you remember what I told you? To have a successful marriage, the Slovenians believe that the groom must carry the bride up all 99 steps, without the bride saying a word.”

“We already had a successful marriage.”

“But this will prove it!”

Without waiting for a reply, Hermann once more rushed up the steps with Ana. For the first half of these steps, it was relatively easy. The two steadily rose above Lake Bled toward the towering mountains surrounding it, and he could see Bled Castle in the distance at the very top of them. But soon after reaching the halfway point of the staircase he began to tire, which again made him question if he really were experiencing a dream, as he couldn’t recall ever being tired in a dream.

Slowly and with great exertion, he continued upward, with sweat pouring down his face and stinging his eyes. He thought that he was going to collapse at any moment, and so did Ana. She even braced herself for a fall. But Hermann didn’t fall. Instead, with

all the strength that he had left he ran up the last steps, and he made it all the way to the top, and he swept his bride inside the building.

It was at this moment that they finally found themselves in their bedroom, and he gently lowered her upon their well-made featherbed.

“Is this real?” he asked her, as he kissed and touched her everywhere and felt her do the same to him.

“Does it matter?” she whispered into his ear.

He tried to answer her with another kiss, but she stopped him. She stopped him and said, “Real or not, this is it. You must finally let me go. This is *sbohem*.”

What she was saying was that there would be no further *na shledanou*. No more “until we meet again.” This was goodbye, and goodbye forever.

“No,” he told her, while shaking his head over and over, and he kept repeating this hoping to make it so.

“You must live, *miláčku můj*,” she told him back, while caressing both his cheeks with her warmth. “You must live for me and continue to make me proud.”

“You, you’re proud of me?” he mumbled, in between his tears.

She answered him with a kiss. A kiss that made him swoon a lot more than the venison had just hours earlier.

Chapter 53

Having not found German soldiers at any of the six synagogues that night, Ivo decided to wait outside the last one he checked: the Pinkas Synagogue. He waited there for hours. Finally, he saw Klara walking up Široká Street from the direction of the river.

She stopped at the corner of Valentinská Street the moment she saw him. She stopped and smiled at him, which caused him to nervously smile back, and he smiled even more when she strode up to him.

“Good evening,” he said to her, as soon as she came to a stop.

“Good evening to you as well,” she said back to him.

“Have you been visiting the synagogues this evening?”

“I was about to visit some. I was at the river just now. It’s lovely there tonight. It’s so warm and you could see the moon reflecting upon the water.”

“Which synagogues were you planning to visit tonight?”

“Oh, I don’t know. This one is my favorite, actually. I come here all the time. I also visit the High Synagogue often. But perhaps I will visit the Maisel tonight as well. It’s on my way home.”

“I cleaned the walls there this morning.”

“I’ve noticed how clean all the buildings look, both inside and out. You do a very nice job. A lesser man might’ve slacked off by now, considering that there’s no one to check your work.”

“There’s always someone watching.”

“Who?”

Hermann glanced upward, and Klara again smiled. She also told him: “I like your shoes.”

“Thank you,” he told her back.

“You weren’t wearing them last night.”

“I had to work last night, and I don’t wear them when I work. I don’t want to get them dirty.”

“So, what are you doing now?”

“I, I don’t know.”

Klara giggled at this, and thinking that she was laughing at him, he lowered his eyes a bit and muttered, “I’m afraid, I, I’m not very smart.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” she told him.

“You’d be the only one. You and that Jewish policeman.”

“Jewish policeman?”

“He’s investigating the killings at the synagogues.”

“There have been killings at the synagogues?”

“Many.”

“How terrible.”

“Don’t feel so sad. The people who died in them were not very nice men.”

“Still, I wouldn’t wish them harm. I wouldn’t even wish harm to the men who . . .
who . . .”

“Who what?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“You’re a very nice person if you can feel sad for bad people. You’re like that
man in the book Mrs. Mlýnková is always reading to me.”

“Which book is that?”

“The one with the man who’s always forgiving people, no matter what bad things
they do.”

“That’s very kind of you to say.”

“Would, would you like me to walk you to the Maisel?”

“Actually,” Klara uttered, while feeling a sudden burst of fright, “I, I like to be
alone when I’m there.”

“Oh. All right.”

“I’m tired anyway. I probably will only spend a few moments at the synagogue
and go home.”

“All right,” he said. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” she said back, and she started toward Maiselová Street. But
suddenly she stopped. She stopped and turned back to him, and she murmured, “Perhaps
tomorrow night we could take a walk. To the river perhaps.”

“I would like that very much. You can find me here. If not at this time, then
sometime a little later.”

“I look forward to it.”

Chapter 54

Hermann was still “dreaming” when he heard the sound of an engine starting. This woke him, and it caused the big grin on his face to disappear at once. At the same time, he saw the sun beginning to rise in the distance. He also noticed that Klaus was asleep next to him while shaking in fright, and he shook him awake.

“What?” Klaus cried out, while feeling that a part of him was still in his nightmare.

“You fell asleep,” Hermann told him, as the Mercedes drove past them, and while gunning the engine he added, “But you got lucky.”

“It’s about time,” Klaus muttered.

Like the night before, Reidl led the men through the ancient and winding streets of Malá Strana, with Hermann performing the same evasion techniques from the night before. The one major difference between now and then was the goldish tint that came over the buildings as the sun rose over it, making them seem even more fairy tale-like than they normally did.

Eventually, Reidl's Mercedes led Hermann and Klaus back over the Vltava River to the other side of Prague. But this time Reidl's car crossed a bridge a little south of Mánes Bridge. A bridge that been previously named Legion Bridge but was now called Smetana Bridge, which took them to Národní Avenue, where the Mercedes parked, right in front of Café Slavia.

While maintaining a good distance behind the Mercedes, Hermann followed it across the bridge, before making a left turn at the intersection of Národní and parking on Smetana Quay, which left the two men facing the other side of the café.

From there, Hermann and Klaus glanced into the windows of the building, and they saw Colonel Reidl ramble inside the doors and march up to the table of Mr. Malý, who stood in anticipation of meeting the man. The two men soon greeted each other, doing so as if they had been the best of friends for a long time, and they sat down and began talking in a friendly manner.

While they continued doing so, Hermann opened his car door, and he said to Klaus: "I'll be back in a minute."

"Where are you going?" Klaus growled.

"To have a look around. Just keep watching them."

Klaus did this, and a few minutes later Hermann returned, and he said to Klaus: "Anything happen?"

"Not a thing," Klaus told him. "Where'd you go?"

"I don't see anyone watching the building. Didn't you say that you arranged for a tail on Malý?"

Klaus shrugged.

“That’s all you can say?” Hermann demanded.

“You’ve read *The Good Soldier Švejk*, too,” Klaus said with a grin. “I guess this is all part of their passive resistance.”

Hermann grinned as well, and he knew at this moment that, even after all that had transpired between the two the night before, he still liked Klaus. He liked him a lot, and he also knew that this feeling was mutual.

Right away, the two men returned their attention to the café. Reidl and Malý were still talking as a waiter came by and left a cup of coffee in front of Mr. Malý. He did this and rushed off, without even glancing at the colonel, who had clearly wanted to order a cup for himself.

“I could really use some of that myself,” Klaus muttered.

“You’d get it faster by flying to Turkey than you would by walking through that door,” Hermann told him.

Klaus smiled at this a bit, and the two continued watching their suspects. Inside the café, these two men continued their conversation, and Reidl reached inside his jacket pocket and took out a blank but full envelope. This he placed on the table before emphatically pushing it toward Mr. Malý, who quickly snatched it before stuffing it into his jacket pocket. Which he did while glancing all around the café suspiciously.

“What do you think is in that envelope?” Klaus asked.

“It could be the key to solving the mystery,” Hermann told him. “Or it could be some mundane legal affair that he wants Malý to handle.”

Quickly, Reidl rose to his feet, along with Mr. Malý, and the two said their goodbyes to each other. They said them as warmly as they had said their hellos, just

before Reidl exited the café and returned to the Mercedes.

“It’s decision time, Klaus,” Hermann said. “Either we continue to follow Reidl or we follow Mr. Malý. It’s your choice.”

Klaus thought this over, but when he couldn’t decide he uttered, “What do you suggest?”

“Mr. Malý.”

“Why?”

“Because if Reidl had some legal affair he wanted handled, he likely would have gotten himself a better lawyer.”

Klaus didn’t respond to this, and the Mercedes started off.

“Well?” Hermann demanded. “What’s it going to be?”

“Malý,” Klaus said. “Let’s follow Malý.”

Chapter 55

Hermann and Klaus didn't have to wait long outside Café Slavia for Malý to leave. He drained his coffee the moment he saw Reidl and his Mercedes drive off, and after dropping some coins onto the table he rushed out of the building himself. He further hustled as fast as he could down Národní, and he crossed the avenue right before scurrying into his office building. He did this watched by Hermann and Klaus from their car, which Hermann had just moved to the other side of the café.

With his heart racing, Malý returned to his office while clutching his jacket pocket, unable to believe what was inside it. At once, he grabbed his phone and dialed Gertrude to tell her the good news. But no one answered, so he hung up while glancing out his window and while arguing with himself over whether he should wait for her to come home.

This argument didn't last long. He decided against waiting, and after making one last phone call, he left his office and took the paternoster down to the lobby, before exiting the Palác Dunaj and jumping inside a Tatra 77 that was parked outside the building. With this, he sped across the very same bridge Hermann and Klaus had recently

followed Reidl over.

But instead of leading Hermann and Klaus into Malá Strana and down its ancient roads, Malý drove south into an industrial part of town called Smíchov before parking on Holečkova Street. There, in front of a decrepit and near empty grocery store, he waited in his car. He waited for more than an hour, with Hermann and Klaus parked about a block and a half behind him.

Malý waited until a small truck came rumbling toward his car from the opposite direction while spewing thick black smoke from its exhaust. This truck parked right across the street from his, and he jumped out of his car the moment he saw it. He also carefully looked around the block, and after seeing no one in either direction, he ran toward the driver's window of the truck, which slowly rolled down as he approached.

"You're late, Luděk," Malý growled, in a tone of voice that seemed both foreign to him and forced. "You know how important this is for me."

"It couldn't be helped, boss," Luděk insisted. "I had engine problems. You're lucky I got here at all."

"You don't expect that there will be any more of these problems, do you?"

Luděk shrugged, and Malý sighed at this, but he climbed inside the truck's passenger seat anyway, and it took off, soon passing Hermann's Škoda while continuing to single-handedly spread smog across the city.

Hermann waited. He waited until the truck was completely out of sight in his rearview mirror before he made a quick U-turn and followed the smoke. He followed it for a handful of blocks, to a large and barb-wired-fenced warehouse on Plzeňská Street, whose entrance was guarded by a pair of well-armed SS soldiers.

At the gate of the warehouse, the truck stopped, and Luděk showed one of the soldiers a piece of paper, along with both men's identification papers. Which the soldier carefully read through. He read through them multiple times before returning the documents and opening the gate, and the truck lumbered inside.

"What is this place?" Hermann asked Klaus, while watching the truck disappear from view a short distance away.

"It's an SS supply warehouse," Klaus answered, with a look of confusion on his face.

"A warehouse of what?"

"Just about everything: weapons, uniforms, equipment. Anything we could possibly need during the course of our operations."

"And someone like Malý can just drive inside it?"

"Not even I could just drive inside it, not without proper authorization."

"Could Reidl provide such authorization?"

"Yes."

"So, that could have been what he gave him in the café."

"I should arrest Malý the second he leaves that warehouse," Klaus said, while shaking his head, "with whatever he takes from there."

"You can arrest him anytime," Hermann said back. "Like after he leads us to the killer."

Chapter 56

That morning, Gertrude took a long and slow walk around the center of town. She told herself that it was to help her forget the night before and cleanse both her body and soul, but she knew that there were a lot more reasons for the walk, and it didn't really matter what these reasons were. The only thing that mattered to her was that the early spring air seemed fresher than it had only the day before and that every building seemed far more beautiful than they usually did.

Eventually, she found herself at the foot of Wenceslas Square, and she started making her way toward the top of it. She did this while recalling all the walks she and her husband took on the kilometer-long street. Just about every night they took a walk on it together, where they would discuss the day's happenings. No matter how busy he was, he would always carve out an hour of his time for it and for her. Often it was late at night, and sometimes it was even after midnight, but he always made the time.

Only now did Gertrude realize just how spoiled her husband had left her. No man she had met since was anything like Artur. Though Hermann at least shared a few of his better qualities, such as his intelligence and his strength of character, and his obvious

reverence of women. She found Hermann even more interesting than she imagined she would when she first encountered him outside Černín Palace, and she lamented a bit at how she'd likely never see him again.

Without even realizing it, Gertrude found herself at the top of the square, facing the statue of the man the square had been named after. Though, at this particular moment, St. Wenceslas looked a lot more like Don Quixote to her than the patron saint of the Czechs, and she giggled a bit while wondering if that had been what Myslbek had intended when he sculpted the statue more than thirty years earlier. She also saw a lot of herself in both the star-crossed king and the wide-eyed knight errant, and this made her giggle even more than before. But she didn't do this for long.

Knowing that she had a lot to do that day, she quickly returned down the square and to her home, where she found a note that Kamča had left her on the bureau by the door, which indicated that the woman had gone food shopping.

In response to the note, Gertrude penned her own note for Kamča, and this took her a long time to write. Once it was finally done, she left it by the bureau and left her home, and she jumped into her car and drove it to Národní. There she parked in front of the boarding house while noticing that Malý's car was gone.

While not certain whether this was something good or bad, Gertrude strode inside the house, where she saw something that surprised her. She saw Klara sitting by the window, staring out of it much like she had the day before. But this wasn't what surprised her. What surprised her was that the woman was smiling just slightly.

"Klara?" Gertrude whispered.

Klara did not respond, but she didn't stop smiling, either, and Gertrude came up

to her and sat next to her. She also smiled. “Is there a reason why you’re smiling?” she asked.

Klara shrugged.

“It starts that way, you know,” Gertrude went on.

“What does?” Klara softly asked.

“You think to yourself that all is lost and that you’ll never be the same person again. But then one day you smile without even realizing it, and this is how it starts.”

“What starts?”

“The road back home. It’s a long journey, but this is how it starts.”

“I, I still relive what happened to me every night.”

“Believe it or not, so do I. But instead of it horrifying me, it now motivates me. Everything I do, including helping you, comes from the hate that I’ve turned on its head.”

“I don’t think I could ever do that. Or even begin to do that. I’m not as strong as you.”

“That’s what I used to think about myself. I thought it right up to the moment I discovered that I was a lot stronger than I thought. This moment will come for you, too. I just know it.”

With these last words, Gertrude hugged Klara, and she kissed her cheek, and it didn’t matter to her at all that the affection was not reciprocated. She knew that the reciprocation would come sometime in the future when Klara would turn the light given to her upon someone else.

For now, Gertrude would take comfort in Klara’s smile, which was still on her face when Gertrude left the house. At the same time, she noticed that Malý’s car was still

not in front of his building, and she jumped into her own car and sped off. She did this without even caring where she was going.

Chapter 57

The truck chugged its way out of the warehouse, again billowing thick black smoke from its exhaust, and it headed down Plzeňská Street.

Following it a safe distance back were Hermann and Klaus. They followed it across the river over what had previously been known as Palacký Bridge and was now called Mozart Bridge, and they continued following it up the riverbank as it stuttered northward. They followed it all the way to Josefov, which was a destination that surprised neither Hermann nor Klaus.

Eventually, the truck parked on Maiselova Street, about equidistance from the Old-New Synagogue above it and the High Synagogue below it.

Parking more a block behind the truck were Hermann and Klaus, who sat in their car while watching it. They watched it for many minutes, without any movement coming from the truck at all.

“What do you think they’re doing?” Klaus asked, with increasing impatience.

“I’m more interested in what they’re going to do,” Hermann answered, “and where they’re going to do it.”

Hermann didn't have to wait long to find an answer to his latter question. Before long, Malý and Luděk exited the truck, and they slowly headed to the back of it, where they took out a large and heavy covered cart with wheels, which they began rolling toward the entrance of the Old-New Synagogue.

"What do you think is in that?" Klaus asked, while leaning forward in his seat to get a better look at the cart.

"I guess we'll find out soon enough," Hermann told him, before the two of them watched the other two enter the synagogue with the cart. At this same moment, Hermann opened his door and started toward the synagogue himself.

Klaus followed, but he suddenly came to a quick stop, even though he wasn't sure why he was stopping. Something had caught his eyes, he thought, or perhaps it was a certain smell. But whatever it was it was something familiar, and this frightened him a little.

"What's wrong?" Hermann asked.

"Nothing," Klaus answered, and as he continued on toward the synagogue, he tried to make himself believe this.

Chapter 58

With Klaus standing just a few steps behind him, Hermann peeked inside one of the windows of the Old-New Synagogue, and he glanced at the unlit chandeliers hanging from inside the small 700-year-old prayer hall.

“Do you see them?” Klaus asked.

“They might’ve already gone inside the cellar,” Hermann answered, with a shake of his head, and the two continued to the front doors of the synagogue. But just as they were about to open them they heard something that made them stop. They heard a loud and strange sound coming from somewhere deep inside the building.

“What was that?” Klaus asked.

“I’m not sure,” Hermann answered, while vaguely recognizing the sound. He further grabbed the handle of the door and pushed it.

Slowly, the door screeched open, and Hermann and Klaus stepped inside the empty and somewhat dark synagogue, and at once they started looking for an arched wooden door. They looked until they reached the back of the building, where they found it not far from the building’s back wall. Not unexpectedly, they also found it locked.

“We could get the battering ram again,” Klaus said.

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Hermann said back, and he went off in search of something, with Klaus following him.

“Now, where are you going?” Klaus demanded.

Hermann answered by entering one of the small rooms that abutted the prayer hall. This particular one was a kitchen of sorts, which they had passed on the way to the door, and after turning on the lights he said, “This is where I’m going.”

“Why?”

Hermann didn’t respond right away. This was because he both noticed and smiled at something on the wall by an old chopping block. Which led him to look around the room, and he quickly located a set of drawers and started rummaging through them. He did this and told Klaus: “Remember when we were in the cellar of the Pinkas Synagogue the other night? There was a dumbwaiter there.”

“So?” Klaus uttered.

Hermann continued rummaging, and he finally found what he was looking for: a flashlight, and he turned it on and pointed the light at a small door on the wall and said, “Just like that one.” He further marched over to the door and opened it, and with the flashlight still clutched in his hand he lifted himself inside the tiny cabinet, causing it to creak more than just a bit.

“You’re not really going down in that, are you?” Klaus asked, while unable to hide the worry on his face.

“Why not?” Hermann answered, while noticing Klaus’s worry. “Thanks to the Reich putting me on a strict diet regimen, I should be plenty light enough.”

“And what if you’re not?”

“Then, I’ll get there just a little faster.”

Without waiting for a reply, Hermann crawled into a tight fetal position, and as he closed the door he told Klaus: “If I’m still in one piece afterward, I’ll meet you by the cellar door.”

Chapter 59

In the eerie darkness, Hermann focused the flashlight onto the doorknob, and he unlocked the door just before opening it. This exposed Klaus, and the two men hurried down the short set of stairs together to the cellar, which was much like the one in the Pinkas Synagogue, at least in terms of its size and structure.

There, with the aid of the light, they saw stacks of supplies as well as the same flat, deep, and immense footprints in the dirt floor that they saw in the Pinkas Synagogue. Just like the prints there, these led to a wall upon which was painted a Star of David. Also leading to this wall were a set of wheel marks and two pairs of normal footprints.

“So, this is where our two friends went,” Hermann said, just before he and Klaus made their way to the wall and stopped in front of it.

“Now what?” Klaus asked.

“Clearly, there must be something behind it,” Hermann said, “just like there must’ve been something behind the wall in the cellar of the Pinkas Synagogue.”

While feeling all along the wall with his palms, Hermann tried to push it in a number of places. But he wasn’t able to budge it at all.

“It will take a lot more than a battering ram to knock this down,” Klaus muttered, while gazing at the wall and the concrete it was made from.

“There must be some simple way to open it,” Hermann insisted, but he couldn’t figure out any way to do this. So, he just silently stood in front of the structure with a stumped expression on his face as he searched for an answer. He did this knowing that the only path to solving the mystery led through the wall. He also knew that it was the only way for him to reach wherever it was that fate had been pushing him toward.

Slowly, the minutes passed, and the hours followed them close behind. But Hermann didn’t notice this. There was only the wall and all it represented. Klaus, on the other hand, didn’t have this problem. He noticed the time all-too-well, and he finally let Hermann know this as he sat on the floor with his elbows on his knees.

Hermann didn’t respond to the outburst, so obsessed was he on solving the puzzle in front of him, which seemed to have limitless unknowns and no identifiable equations. But even this obsession had limits, and eventually even he became compelled to give up.

Though just before he could voice this, the two men heard something. They heard the sound of something striking the back wall of the building.

“What was that?” Klaus mumbled, while rising to his feet with a face full of fright.

The sound was soon followed by another. This was of someone methodically climbing a wooden ladder outside the building. After about a minute of this, the sound suddenly changed, to that of someone climbing something metallic.

“There are metal rungs on the back wall of the synagogue,” Hermann said. “They used to run up the entire wall but now they start about 3 meters from the ground.”

“What happened to the others?” Klaus asked.

“They removed them.”

“Why?”

“Because,” Hermann answered with an accentuated sigh, “because people kept climbing up them to break into the attic, to see if there really was a golem hidden inside it.”

“And that’s where he’s going right now, to the attic.”

“It’s only a legend, Klaus.”

“Is it? What makes you so sure?”

Before Hermann could answer this question, he was interrupted. What interrupted him was the same strange and loud sound that they had heard outside the synagogue when they got there. This caused Klaus to turn to Hermann with even more fright than he had already been expressing.

“I’ll show you that it’s just a legend,” Hermann barked.

Grabbing Klaus’s arm, Hermann dragged him up the cellar stairs, and after they reached the ground floor, he dragged him outside into the darkness of the evening. Finally, he led him to the back of the building, where they saw the ladder, the metal rungs, and the closed attic door.

“Who’s up there?” Hermann called out, while pointing the flashlight toward the attic.

There was no response.

“If you don’t come out,” Hermann added, “we’re just going to come up after you.”

Again, there was no reply, so Hermann started up the ladder. Though he stopped

when he realized that Klaus wasn't following him, and he said to him: "Aren't you coming?"

"I'll wait down here," Klaus insisted, with fright still covering his face.

Hermann nodded, and he made his way up both the ladder and the metal rungs. He did this quickly, so it didn't take him long before he was at the attic door, which he found unlocked. Though when he opened it, he discovered that the room was both empty and completely uninteresting, apart from two things. The first of these things was that there was another wall with a Star of David painted on it steps away, and the second of these interesting things was that there were a pair of slippers right beside it. Ivo's slippers.

Chapter 60

Hermann returned down both the metal rungs and the wooden ladder, and he told Klaus what he found in the attic.

“I knew I should’ve arrested Ivo,” Klaus growled, while shaking his head.

“I still don’t believe that he committed the murders,” Hermann insisted.

“But he’s obviously involved.”

“I told you that from the very beginning of this. But we’ll only find out how he’s involved by getting through that door.”

“I think we should just wait in the car for those two to return. They have to come out sometime. At least it’s more comfortable in the car.”

“What if they don’t come out?” Hermann asked.

“What do you mean?” Klaus asked back. “Where else could they go?”

“That wall leads to somewhere, and that somewhere certainly can’t be out here. We must figure out where it leads, and I think that we need to do this right now.”

“Why right now?”

“As Kant described in that book Dita wrote her paper about, there are two types of

knowledge: *a posteriori* and *a priori*. Knowledge gained through experience, and knowledge that exists independently of it. Through both of them — through both my instincts and my experiences as a police detective — I know that if we don't follow them tonight, we'll lose the trail, and likely for good."

"And how are we supposed to follow them?" Klaus asked, while trying hard not to think about The Eldorado club in reaction to Hermann mentioning Kant's name.

Hermann didn't answer Klaus's question, and for the obvious reason. He just walked back inside the synagogue followed by Klaus, and the two men again descended the stairs to the cellar, and again Hermann walked up to the wall. But now having given his mind a little time to unwind, it suddenly grasped at what he hoped was at least a step toward the solution he had been seeking.

"I wonder," he mumbled to himself, while staring at the star on the wall and all that it symbolized, "I wonder if the means to open the wall is somehow related to something in the Bible, or perhaps in the Talmud. What in those books dealt with walls?"

Nothing came to Hermann's mind, and he cried out, "If only I had paid more attention when I was in cheder as a boy."

"Joshua," Klaus uttered.

"What?" Hermann uttered back.

"The *Book of Joshua* deals with walls."

"That's right, Joshua and his army brought down the walls of Jericho. But how?"

"Horns. They blew horns and the walls came tumbling down."

"Sound. We heard a sound when we came to the synagogue earlier and just now before Ivo disappeared behind the wall up in the attic. Maybe the wall is sound

activated.”

With a burst of excitement, Hermann started searching through the supplies with the aid of the flashlight.

“Now what are you looking for?” Klaus asked.

“I’ll know when I find it,” Hermann told him.

It took him many minutes, but Hermann finally did just that. He found a large ram’s horn in a box and brought it over to Klaus. He further gave Klaus the flashlight and said, “Point it at the wall.”

“What is that?” Klaus asked, while pointing at the horn with a look of confusion.

“A shofar. We use it on the High Holidays.”

“Use it for what?”

Hermann answered by blowing the shofar, which caused not only a roar but also the wall to open just a little from the edge.

Quickly, Hermann returned the shofar, and he and Klaus rushed up to the wall. There, after expending a considerable amount of exertion, they were able to push the wall all the way open, exposing a small shaft that led from the attic above all the way to an area below the cellar. In this shaft was a cable, which was made of thick rope, and when the two men looked down, they saw a wooden enclosure a handful of meters below them.

“It must be an elevator of sorts,” Hermann said. “Like the kind they use in mines.”

“How do we call it?” Klaus said back.

“I don’t know,” Hermann answered, while staring at the structure. “But there’s a trapdoor on top.”

He said this and grabbed the rope, and he slowly began descending it.

Chapter 61

Hermann slowly approached the top of the elevator car, and as soon as he got close enough to it, he released the cable and jumped onto the roof, subsequently falling to his knees in the process.

There he stayed. He did so that he could open the trapdoor, which was a bit stuck. But he finally pried it open just as Klaus finished descending the cable and reached the roof. At the same moment, Hermann jumped inside the elevator, and he cracked the wooden floor just a bit as he landed.

Klaus followed him, and he almost split the floor in two. But he didn't even notice this, as something else had grabbed his attention. The same something that had grabbed the attention of Hermann, who was now standing outside the elevator and looking on in shock. Slowly, Klaus joined him and the two men quietly stared.

They stared at a narrow dirt tunnel, which had a low ceiling and was lit by a set of carbide lamps that were hanging along its length. But this really wasn't what shocked them. What shocked them was that on both sides of the tunnel stood a combination of old storefronts and the remains of former buildings.

“What is this place?” Klaus mumbled.

“I can only guess,” Hermann mumbled back. “Around fifty years ago, the city began reconstructing Josefov. They knocked down whole streets as well as many shops and other buildings, including a number of synagogues. They also knocked down all the bordellos my father once gleefully told me about. But it would seem that the community made use of all that carnage. It’s likely what’s holding this tunnel up.”

“But why? What reason would they have for a tunnel?”

“I have no idea why it was originally built or even when it was, but maybe at the start of the occupation it was used similarly as how the Roman catacombs were once used, as a place where people could worship freely. You’d be surprised at the places people worship in Theresienstadt. I know I was.”

While saying this, Hermann recalled all that he had witnessed during Friday evenings at the camp. He recalled at how people would gather every Sabbath, in contrivance of not just the official rules but also of all the misery they were suffering. Sometimes they would gather in an old garage and at other times they would do so in a small storage space. They would even meet at times in the attic of the hospital. They created makeshift synagogues out of all these places, and while recalling them Hermann also recalled the envy he always felt at those who could have faith at such times, especially when he couldn’t find any even in the best of them.

“Who knows,” Hermann added, while he continued to glance through the tunnel, “maybe, maybe even fifty years ago, the community anticipated that someone like you might one day come to the city.”

Hermann hadn’t even finished saying these words when he started down one end

of the tunnel.

“Where are you going?” Klaus asked, with no small amount of fear. A big part of him wanted to leave the tunnel and to never return.

Hermann answered Klaus’s question by pointing to the wheel marks and footprints on the dirt ground, and he said, “I’m following our suspects.”

Klaus followed, too, more than a bit unsurely, and right away he had the strange feeling that he was walking inside the most recent edition of his horrific dream. He could even recall seeing some of the same storefronts in it. But trying not to think about this, he asked Hermann: “Where do you think this tunnel leads?”

“If I’m not mistaken, we’re walking right toward the High Synagogue.”

Being that the synagogue was only a block away, it didn’t take the men more than five minutes to reach the end of the tunnel, which led to another tunnel that was somewhat perpendicular to the first. In this tunnel, they also found a closed elevator.

“This one must go up to the High Synagogue,” Hermann said, after the two stopped in front of it. He also pointed to his right, toward both the wheel marks and the footprints on the ground, which were joined by another set of footprints, with this one belonging to a woman.

“It looks like our suspects have company,” Hermann remarked, before following the marks and adding, “I think we are now heading toward the Pinkas Synagogue.”

“Whose footprints do you think those are?” Klaus asked, as he followed.

“Whose do you think they are?” Hermann asked back, while having a pretty good idea of whose they were.

“If I knew, I wouldn’t be asking.”

“We’ll find out soon enough.”

Carefully, Klaus wondered about Hermann’s implication, and he wondered how he would react if it were true. He also wondered if this would affect how he had long wanted to conclude the case.

The men continued on. This tunnel was far longer than the first, so the two spent almost twenty minutes traversing it. Though eventually they approached yet another intersection, where they spotted yet another elevator, which Hermann supposed led up to the Pinkas Synagogue. But this wasn’t all that they found.

They also began hearing voices. A set of them, belonging to both a pair of men and a woman. This caused the two of them to slow more and more, and when they came upon the edge of the intersection, they did so with an overabundance of caution.

The voices now were not only louder but clearer, too, and the men could recognize two of them before they even peeked around the corner. So, when they finally did peek, they were not surprised to see Gertrude there along with Mr. Malý and Luděk. But what did surprise them was seeing Malý and Luděk carrying two heavy gold-plated Torahs toward Gertrude, who was standing over a large black wooden crate that already had a few Torahs placed inside it.

The scene was so shocking to Klaus that he couldn’t help gasp Gertrude’s name.

“Sshhh,” Hermann whispered, just as Malý and Luděk reached Gertrude, who did something that surprised them even more. It especially surprised Hermann. First, she kissed two separate pairs of her fingers before gently laying these same fingers onto the Torahs, which she did just prior to the men carefully placing the objects in the crate.

“What are those things?” Klaus quietly asked, while pointing at the items in the

crate.

Hermann told him, and he explained: “Those are the scrolls I was telling you about when we were in the prayer hall at the Spanish Synagogue. That was what was missing from the ark there and from the one in the Klausen Synagogue, and now we know why they were missing.”

The two men continued watching. They watched Malý and Luděk walk up to a nearby table where sat another dozen Torahs, and the two men each collected one and slowly carried them over to Gertrude.

“There are a lot more than six of them,” Klaus muttered.

“Like I told you,” Hermann responded, “some of the other synagogues in the district were destroyed by the city. There are also other synagogues in Prague and elsewhere in the country. I wouldn’t be surprised if that were the country’s entire collection. I bet some of them are more than a thousand years old.”

“Are they valuable?”

“Only to us.”

Again, the men reached Gertrude with their Torahs, and she again kissed them before they gently laid them into the crate.

“Why is she kissing them?” Klaus asked.

“We Jews kiss the Torah out of love for it,” Hermann told him, as Malý and Luděk once more headed toward the table.

“But why is *she* kissing them?”

“Apparently,” Hermann said, as he turned toward Klaus, “apparently she’s Jewish.”

“She can’t be,” Klaus insisted, while shaking his head in a nearly incessant manner.

“Why can’t she be?”

Klaus was certain that he could give a million reasons why, but he couldn’t enunciate any of them. It seemed at that moment that everything he had thought he had known about the woman had been a lie, and this one seemed the very least of them. So, he just stood there in shock while watching the men finish packing the crate.

Just as soon as this was done, the men began lifting a heavy black wooden board that was lying beside the crate, which had the insignia of the SS painted on the top of it. Lifting this took them some time, but when it was finally above their waists they placed it on the crate, and after picking up some hammers and nails from the ground, they began nailing the crate shut.

“Unbelievable,” Klaus murmured.

“What is?” Hermann asked.

“They must have gotten that crate from the SS warehouse. Along with proper documentation, it’s effectively like a diplomatic pouch. Nobody would ever search it. Not the army, not the border police. Not even the SS.”

Hermann smiled at this, as now most of the mystery had become mostly clear to him.

“What’s so funny?” Klaus demanded.

“She’s tricked Colonel Reidl into helping her transport the country’s Torahs,” Hermann told him, with a glee that he refused to hide.

“But how?”

“That treasure must’ve been just a ruse. I bet she had Malý feed Reidl information about it. He was their informant, after all. He probably made up some story about helping someone transport it and that they needed that crate, which Reidl promised to supply in the hope of stealing the treasure if he couldn’t find it beforehand. It wouldn’t surprise me if those murdered men got too close to the truth.”

“It’s strange that Reidl would trust Malý.”

“He clearly didn’t. Or he wouldn’t have been trying to steal the treasure on his own.”

“But he trusted him with the crate.”

“I doubt it. Somehow they’ve tricked him into thinking that it would be shipping at a different time or at a different place.”

“I’m going to arrest all of them right now,” Klaus said, while realizing at that moment that everything was going to work out even better than he had hoped, and he started toward the trio.

But Hermann stopped him. He stopped him and said, “What’s the hurry? Don’t you want to see the end of the opera?”

“Not really. Listen, Hermann, this has gone way too far already. I have a responsibility to arrest them.”

“We still don’t know how they plan on getting that crate out of here.”

“They’ll just take it back up in the elevator.”

“The elevator only went up to the cellar and to the attic. There was no stop at the ground level, and there’s no way they’re getting that crate up in the dumbwaiter. Nor are they going to carry it up any stairs or down any ladders. It must literally weigh a ton.”

“What difference does it make how they plan on getting the crate out of here?”

“We don’t know who else is involved with this. We can’t even be sure that they were the murderers. They could still lead us to them.”

“Clearly, they were the murderers. You said yourself that the men got too close to the truth. Who else could’ve done it?”

“That’s what I want to find out. Look, you just may be right about all of this. But if we follow them to the end of the line we’ll know for sure. Isn’t that worth just a little longer wait? It isn’t like they are going to escape from your grasp.”

Klaus thought about this. He also thought about how acting or not acting could affect the way he wanted to bring the case to a conclusion. He thought through every permutation, and through everything that could possibly go right and wrong. He thought about this for a long time, right before sighing and uttering, “All right.”

With this, he and Hermann went back to watching. They watched Malý and Luděk finish nailing the crate shut.

“I just don’t understand,” Klaus mumbled, while shaking his head once again.

“What don’t you understand?” Hermann asked.

“I don’t understand why anyone would go through all of this trouble for a bunch of prayer scrolls.”

“You couldn’t understand. Nor could I, for that matter. We’d have to have faith.”

Hermann said this, but at the same time he couldn’t help feel something strange. He wasn’t exactly sure what he was feeling, but he knew that he was feeling something after seeing all that Gertrude had done and risked to save something whose meaning was only spiritual. He might have even been tempted to call this feeling a twitch of faith, or at

least an impulse toward it, if he had ever experienced such a thing before.

Soon, the men finished fastening the crate, and Malý and Luděk began slowly rolling it forward, followed by Gertrude.

“You were right,” Klaus said. “They’re not taking it back to the Old-New Synagogue. They must be taking it to the Klausen Synagogue.”

“I don’t think so,” Hermann said back, as he took a step around the corner and saw both the cart and the three people behind it well in the distance. “The Klausen isn’t in that direction. I don’t know where they’re taking it. But there’s one way to find out.”

Chapter 62

The tunnel that led from the Pinkas Synagogue to whereabouts unknown was even longer than the tunnel that connected the synagogue with the High Synagogue. Hermann and Klaus followed Gertrude and the men for more than a half-hour without seeing any end to it.

“Where could they possibly be going?” Klaus murmured to Hermann, while feeling himself tiring with every step. He never felt such exhaustion before, and he knew that it came not just from his lack of sleep. The web that he had been tangling himself into was weighing him down with every step he took.

“I really don’t know where they’re going,” Hermann murmured back. “But we can’t be too far from the river. Last night, if you remember, Reidl stopped by the Čech Bridge, or whatever you are calling it today, and he looked out over the water for a long time. There are a number of docks in that area. Maybe that’s how they’re planning on moving the Torahs, by ship.”

“It would certainly be faster than trying to get them through all the checkpoints on the roads. It would be safer, too.”

“And once they reach the Elbe, they could go from there right to the North Sea. They could conceivably take the Torahs anywhere in the world, assuming that they didn’t get torpedoed or bombed from the air. Which is a pretty big assumption. It would be an enormous risk, but perhaps they truly believe that something will not only guide them but protect them as well.”

Everyone continued on, and Klaus again began experiencing the feeling that he was back in his nightmare. Every object they passed along the tunnel walls reminded him of this. But what really frightened him was when he began hearing the faint sounds of stomping feet in the distance. Sounds that were much like those from his dream.

“Didn’t you hear that?” he asked Hermann, when he made no reaction at all to it.

“Hear what?” Hermann asked back

“Something’s following us.”

“I don’t hear a thing.”

“It’s the golem, I tell you. He’s following us.”

“Stay in this century, Klaus. I beg you.”

Klaus tried to do just this, but he kept looking back, and while he couldn’t see anything, he could still not only hear the stomping feet but also sensed that they were getting louder and closer.

Eventually, Gertrude and her companions came to the end of the tunnel and to a wall, where they all stopped. There Malý withdrew a shofar from his coat pocket and blew into it, causing the wall to open a little, and he and Luděk opened it fully. This exposed both the river and a boat waiting on it beside the docks.

Seeing this finally brought Klaus back to reality and calmed him, and he knew

that this was his chance to bring the whole case to its proper conclusion. So, he rushed ahead of Hermann toward the three, moving faster and faster until he was running much as he had in his dream, and he reached them just as they wheeled the cart outside onto the dock.

“That’s far enough,” Klaus called out, while whipping out his pistol and pointing it at them.

The three stopped at once, and they slowly turned to Klaus, who was met by Hermann, who was out of breath from trying to keep up with Klaus.

“Hello, darling,” Gertrude said with a big grin, as if seeing him there were the most normal of things.

“Darling?” Klaus uttered, with as much contempt as he could muster, which wasn’t much. “I don’t even know you.”

“Don’t be too upset. Sometimes I’m not sure if I know me, either.”

“You used me.”

“We used each other, dear. You needed someone to call your girlfriend and I needed connections to your office. I call that *quid pro quo*.”

Suddenly, many things made sense to Hermann. It was as if the veil covering what remained of the mystery and Gertrude had both been lifted, or at least mostly lifted, and while thinking about the conversation at dinner the night before he asked her: “Was it you who told the Allies that Heydrich was driving to Berlin on the day he was killed?”

Gertrude answered this with a smile.

“This country owes you a debt it can never repay,” Hermann told her, with his own smile.

“Believe me when I tell you that the pleasure was all mine,” Gertrude told him back. “I’m only sorry that the people of Lidice had to pay the price for it.”

“If Heydrich were alive, he’d be doing worse. Much worse.”

“You do realize that you won’t live through the night, don’t you?” Klaus said to her, with his voice rising a bit. “What’s more, you’ll wish that it would end a lot sooner than that.”

“Spare me your threats, Klaus,” she growled. “I’ve already watched my husband murdered in my own home.”

“What are you talking about? He committed suicide. You told me so yourself.”

“I told you what I was told to tell everyone.”

“I don’t understand.”

“My husband was the Deputy Minister of Defense under General Syrový when the Germans invaded,” Gertrude said, specifically to Hermann. “Because he was German himself, they expected that he’d be willing to take over from the general. So, they all came to our house one morning: Reich Minister Frank and all his henchmen. I wanted to send them away, but my husband was more diplomatic. He decided to hear Frank out in his study, and I was sent to the bedroom. That’s when I heard the gunshot.”

“So, how do you know he didn’t shoot himself?” Klaus demanded.

“Because on hearing the gunshot I ran downstairs and into the study, and I saw Frank hovering over my husband’s body with his Luger in his hand. There was still smoke coming out of it. My husband, he would’ve never worked for you. He despised you. He was ashamed to call himself German.”

“I still don’t understand. How were you able to ingratiate yourself among us? It

certainly wasn't my doing."

"It was Frank's doing. He was supposed to recruit my husband, not kill him. But my husband got him so mad that he lost his head. Calling it suicide was the only way he could save face, and his career."

"But why did you play along with that?"

"Because he made me a deal: tell everyone that it was a suicide and I could be the 'belle of the ball,' as he put it."

"It seems that all three of us made deals," Hermann uttered.

"But I only made mine," Gertrude uttered back, "for this moment alone."

"But how were you able to hide the fact that you're a Jew?" Klaus screeched.

"I never hid it," Gertrude told him. "Everyone just assumed what I was because of my husband and because of the men I dated like you, and because of how I look and act. They could've easily discovered the truth if they had wanted to discover it. But that would've run counter to all the filth you spew about how different we are."

"I don't know what to say."

"There's nothing more to say, Klaus, and so you now see, you can do nothing more to me than what's already been done. Shall we go now?"

Suddenly, Hermann realized that he hadn't asked Gertrude the most important question, and he said to her: "So, did you murder those men or not?"

"Murder what men?" she asked back.

"We'll be the ones asking the questions," Klaus barked. "Let's go."

"Let's not," came a deep baritone voice to Klaus's left, and he turned toward the sound, along with everyone else, and they saw Colonel Reidl, who was holding a gun in

his hand. He also had a big smile on his face. “Put the gun down, captain,” he added.

Klaus, though, didn’t obey.

“I will shoot you, you know,” Reidl insisted, without any emotion at all. “I could’ve had you shot long ago. I’ve known all about your proclivities. You have just been a little more useful to me alive. But not anymore. So, drop the gun.”

Carefully, Klaus thought through his options. He did this and just as carefully laid the gun onto the ground.

“Good girl,” Reidl told him.

At the same time, Luděk rushed up to the colonel, who turned to Malý and said, “You made just one little mistake, my friend. You didn’t know that your man was working for me the whole time.”

“No one’s perfect,” Malý said back, with a bit of a shrug.

“I never really believed that you didn’t know where the treasure was.”

“About that treasure —” Luděk tried to say.

But Reidl interrupted him. He interrupted him by saying, “— Just put the crate on the boat.”

“We’ve been double-crossed, colonel,” Luděk insisted. “There’s only junk in the crate.”

This more than shocked Reidl, and he turned his gun toward Gertrude and growled, “Where is it? Where’s the treasure?”

Gertrude didn’t say a word, and Reidl aimed his gun at her head and said, “I suggest you come up with an answer, and quickly.”

“Sometimes silence is an answer,” Hermann told him.

Angrily, Reidl turned to Hermann in response, and he turned his gun upon him, too, and he growled, "Speaking of silence . . ."

Hermann didn't flinch at this. He had been long ready for fate to finally catch up with him. But Klaus was not.

"No!" he cried out, and he jumped in front of Hermann just as Reidl fired. The bullet pierced Klaus's chest, sending him into Hermann's arms, with Hermann at the same time coming to a stunning realization.

"I should've known that he was your lover," Reidl barked at Klaus, as he started backing up toward the entrance of the tunnel. He did this while continuing to hold the gun on the others. Luděk followed his lead and the colonel said to him: "We'll find the treasure ourselves."

"There is no treasure, you idiot," Gertrude howled, causing both men to come to a stop. If she was going to die, she told herself, she was going to die with some pride. A lot of it. "You've been conned," she added, "and by a bunch of Jews. Please never forget that."

"We'll see who gets the last laugh," Reidl countered, and he again pointed his gun at Gertrude's head. But before he could shoot a rock landed not far from his feet, causing him to both jump and misfire.

He and everyone else turned in the direction from which the rock had come, and they saw a lone woman standing above them on the embankment wearing a paisley shawl.

"Klara," Gertrude uttered in surprise. She was surprised that the reciprocation for her kindness had come much sooner than she had expected.

Reidl right away fired his gun at Klara, just missing her, and she ran down the

road with a face full of fright. Still, he was about to fire at her again when Gertrude rushed up to the rock and picked it up. Hearing her approach, the colonel spun toward her, just as she smashed the rock into his head, releasing all her pent-up hate and knocking the man to the ground dead.

Watching this, a frightened Luděk reached down and grabbed the gun from Reidl, and he pointed it at Gertrude.

“Put it down,” he ordered her, while directing his shaking hand at the rock. “Put it down!”

Without hesitation, Gertrude dropped the rock. Though Luděk wasn’t sure what to do next. So, he just stood there, getting more frightened with each second that passed. Soon, this fright got much worse, as soon they all could hear the sound of stomping feet coming from inside the tunnel. Even Hermann could hear it this time. The sound got louder and louder, and Luděk dropped the gun and ran down the riverbank.

Though Gertrude, Malý, and Hermann didn’t move. They were actually far more curious as to who was behind the stomping feet than they were frightened of it, and eventually a figure appeared in the entrance of the tunnel.

It was Ivo. But it wasn’t the Ivo Hermann and Klaus had come to know, or even the one Malý knew in passing. This Ivo wasn’t limping. He was standing tall in a pair of strange and large shoes.

Without saying a word, he marched up to Reidl’s body as if it were common trash, and he effortlessly lifted it into his arms. Only then did he say something: “You don’t have to worry. I will do with him what I did with the others so that they wouldn’t soil your holy places.”

As soon as this was said, Ivo carried the man back to the entrance of the tunnel, and there he turned around and said to all of them: “You people, you’re my friends. You’ve helped me since I was a boy. You gave me a job and respect and love, too, even. You gave me everything I have, and Mr. Brod, he gave me these special shoes for my feet. He finished them for me just before he left the city. He worked late at night so that I can walk right and without pain. I only wish I could wear them more. They’re too nice for work. I’m afraid I’ll ruin them. And Mrs. Mlýnková, she don’t like any shoes in her house. I can only enjoy them here at night, while remembering everyone I love. If you see Mr. Brod sometime, please tell him that I enjoy his shoes very much and that I will never forget his kindness.”

With this, the man turned back around, and as he made his way into the tunnel he added, “I promise that I will take care of your buildings, and that I will keep them clean. I will take care of all of them until you return. I will care for them like they are my own.”

Moments later, he was gone, and soon after so was the stomping.

“I guess,” Klaus mumbled, who was still in Hermann’s arms and quickly fading, “I guess there really was a golem, after all.”

“Why?” Hermann mumbled back. “Why’d you jump in front of me?”

“I had no more control over it than I’ve had over anything else I’ve done in my life.”

“Tell me something: were you the one who killed all those men?”

“What makes you think that?”

“I’ve run out of other suspects. I might have even started suspecting myself if I had the opportunity. But you had the opportunity, the capability, and I just now realized

that you had the motive as well: to get me out of Theresienstadt.”

“I actually did it for myself.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was the only way I could make up for what happened to us, and to relieve my guilt.”

“Make up?” Hermann uttered, while trying to hold back the tears. “But it was me who betrayed you.”

“No, it wasn’t. It wasn’t your fault that you couldn’t love me.”

“I . . . I don’t know what to say,” Hermann mumbled, while lowering his eyes.

“I’ve been haunted by this dream,” Klaus went on. “For months, I’ve been haunted by it, ever since I got stationed here in Prague. That’s when I learned what happened to you and Ana. The nightmares got so bad that I couldn’t sleep. I would just walk and walk all night. On one of these nights, I was walking through Josefov when I saw them. I saw the SS men in the synagogues. Killing them was the only way I could save both you and myself. All I needed to make the plan work was to find a convenient suspect to blame, and I knew that you’d be able to come up with one.”

“How could you have been so sure of this?”

“I knew those men were scratching around the synagogues for a reason, and that you’d likely discover it, and that this would surely lead to a suspect. And I was right. My plan almost worked. I, I guess that’s the story of my life.”

Hermann could no longer hold back the tears, and Klaus shook his head in reaction to this. He shook it and said, “Don’t. My . . . my pocket.”

“What?” Hermann said back.

“Look in my jacket pocket.”

Hermann did this, and he pulled out a set of papers.

“They’ll get you out of the country,” Klaus told him.

“There really were papers?” Hermann muttered in shock.

“I, I was actually hoping to leave with you. But now, now maybe you can find a better traveling companion.”

Klaus said this and passed away, and Hermann, who was crying even more than before, kissed the man’s forehead and whispered, “Goodnight, my friend, and . . . *sbohem.*”

“I’m sorry, Hermann,” Gertrude uttered, “but we have to leave right now. You as well.”

Hermann responded by looking up at her and at Malý, who said to him: “I need you to help me get the Torahs on board.”

“This is my brother Tonda,” Gertrude told Hermann.

“*Shalom,*” he said to both of them.

Chapter 63

The boat began to disembark from the dock, with both Hermann and Gertrude looking on from the center of the deck.

“Who will pay Ivo?” Hermann asked, just as the thought struck him.

“The caretaker?” Gertrude asked back.

Hermann nodded.

“My brother and I have planned this out for a long time,” Gertrude said. “He will be well taken care of, I promise you. All of our friends will be taken care of.”

Again, Hermann nodded, and he once more looked on. This time he looked at the body of his friend, who was lying on the dock. It was the most peaceful he had ever seen Klaus, and this reminded him of when he first met him, when he looked so desperate for a rest.

Steadily, the ship continued down the river, and Hermann found himself drifting toward the stern of the boat so that he could continue looking at Klaus. At the same time, he realized that he was also looking at both Josefov and the city he loved for the last time.

Slowly, but not nearly slow enough for Hermann, all these things started to fade

from his view, and with the waters of the river slapping against the ship he began hearing a song. He heard a song that only he could hear. It was Smetana's "Vltava," and he could hear it just as clearly as he had on the morning he left Theresienstadt. He could feel the beats and the rhythms of the song rising from the currents of the river, and he could feel Karel Ančerl directing its movements, and he started humming along with them.

"That song," Gertrude mumbled, as she approached him from behind.

"What about it?" Hermann asked after she had stopped beside him, while he continued his looking.

"Did you know that its melody actually comes from a much older piece, and that this older piece is actually the basis as well of 'Hatikvah'?"

"'Hatikvah'? You know, I haven't heard that song since I was a boy. My mother liked to sing it around the house now and then. But you're right. The melodies are indeed the same. Isn't it strange how two very different people found their dreams of self-determination in the same exact melody?"

"'Hatikvah' is going to be the national anthem of the state we're building in Palestine."

"Is that where you're taking the Torahs?"

"And myself. I hope to never see Europe again. What about you?"

"Me?"

"Where will you go?"

"I really don't know. Prague is the only home I've ever wanted. I will miss her dearly."

"I'm an officer in the Haganah. That's the army we've been forming over there.

We could use a man like you in my division.”

“Is that so?”

“Assuming you can take orders from a woman, that is.”

“I was married for twenty years,” he told her, with a bit of a grin. A grin she couldn’t help return. At the same time, he thought about his dream from the other night and what his mother had said in it — and what had long been her dream — and he mumbled, “Next year in Jerusalem.”

“What was that?” Gertrude asked.

Instead of answering, he said, “I guess, I guess I wouldn’t get any *utopence* over there.”

“Or venison,” she said back. “But just wait till you try my leg of lamb in mint sauce, and my chicken soup with knaidels.”

“You can cook?”

“I can do a little of everything.”

Again, both of them grinned, and as they leaned against each other, Hermann again could hear “Vltava.” Though this time it was changing. It was changing just slightly, into the other song. The one that was both different and the same. The one his mother had sung to him. The one that was leading him toward a something he thought only days earlier was impossible. A future.

The End