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ABSTRACT

The following piece of work is the first 18,000 (aprox) words of a longer novel. The narrative is placed in the pre-war years of 1935-1937. The setting is primarily the free-city of Gdansk, which held free-city status from the end of the First World War until the occupation at the start of the second. Historically Gdansk is a Polish city, however since the break-up of old Poland between 1772 and 1795 the city was incorporated into Prussia and subjected to a period of Germanization. This continued until 1918 where upon defeat in the war the United Nations decided against handing Danzig (the German name for the city) back to the newly reformed Poland and instead (because of the high Germanic population) opted to form the Free City of Gdansk controlled by themselves, with trade links to both countries.

Because of the much higher German population in the region (Pomerania) and also because of a clear distinction in terms of wealth and class, the new regime changed very little from the old one. German politicians stayed in power and the Poles remained an underclass.

Things got worse from 1935, the free-city elections of that year were generally seen to be fixed and with this the Nazi party of Germany took control of the government. From here on Danzig became incorporated within the German Reich. The Polish people suffered great hardships during this period, which led to the formations of certain underground movements such as the Gmina Polska. Work, during this period was scarce and what there was was generally to be found on the Danzig dockyards.

In my creative writing piece I have tried to display a sense of what it would have been like for a young ethnically Polish man to live within this city of great change in the period just prior to the start of the Second World War. I have attempted

to show a great confusion with the young Polish community who have never lived within the country of their heritage.

CHAPTER 1

There is an old Polish saying ‘a guest sees more in an hour than the host in a year’. At the wedding of Miroslaw Zielinski and his soon to be wife Maria Nowicki, one of the invited guests needed less than the proverbial sixty minutes to understand what Miroslaw could not have foreseen had he been granted a million of them. The ceremony itself went along as planned and only the most eagle-eyed of spectators would have noticed anything amiss. Unfortunately for the future Mrs Zielinski the current occupier of that title had something that all true Slavic women possess; eyesight that the average hawk would kill for.

Pawel Zielinski, on the other hand did not share his wife’s talent, possessing no all-seeing eye. His beloved would claim that this was because his eyes were shut more often than open; he would counter this by grunting loudly and pretending that he had not heard her.

This was the way with Polish families and Pawel was quite happy to fall into his role. He was a simple man with simple needs and some would say backed these up with a simple mind. As far as putting on an official front, he appeared, as did most men of his generation, as the head of the family, the money-maker. As far as he was concerned his twenty-five years working on the Danzig/Gdansk dockyards had paid for every meal that his wife, the once-beautiful Mrs Zielinski and his two sons had ever consumed under his roof and every stitch that had ever covered their backs.

Agata Zielinski was the true head of the household. No decision was made within those historic stone-clad walls without her say so. No child or husband had ever left through that large old front door without Agata’s full approval of what they were wearing or where they were going. There were three men in her life and no-one on the outside could deny that she had anything but love for all of them. Those on the

inside might suggest that she loved not only them, but also the opportunity to rule their lives. Every shirt that sat on their Slavic shoulders and every meal that had ever settled within their over-active stomachs had been chosen and prepared by the great lady. There was no doubting that she was a clever woman, so if anyone was going to notice the discreet but clear looks that her future daughter-in-law Maria Nowicki was aiming in the incorrect direction during her wedding ceremony, it would be Agata.

The two boys that were her reason for living were now men (as she hated to be reminded). Her youngest was Mirosław, her eldest, Marek was, in his father's eye a fine man; as broad a back as any on the shipyard. No other could lift as much, pull as hard, or climb as high as Marek. He was a worker, which coupled with his good looks meant that he was rarely short of desired company; taking after Paweł in many ways. Good money was there to be made on the dock and despite his relatively poor upbringing, or maybe because of it, Marek felt that he was the man to make it. He excelled as a docker, as he did at most things, but was best known for his wrestling. His rivals nicknamed him 'The Bear' and Marek revelled in the masculine tag, despite the fact that their reason for giving it to him was less than complimentary; as every student of Polish folklore understands that the Bears are the nurturers and mummies of the kingdom. Marek dominated the Gdansk all-comer championships and despite the amateur nature of the event, pocketed more from a good contest than he could hope to make in a month at the yard.

Paweł Zielinski had been as good a looking man as any in old Danzig; he had the choice of the city's girls and was only finally forced to settle with Agata by his ever-zealous and overly-concerned mother. In Marek he saw these same features. He saw a strong man who stretched the fabric of his wife's handmade shirts and whose hands alone were as large as the heads of the smaller boys that hung around the docks.

He was blessed with all that was considered fine in a Slavic man, a pair of deep-set dark and mysterious eyes, with a head of thick black hair, tanned skin and a broad (although twice-broken) nose. With looks like these it was no surprise that the local girls swooned. Quite often, at his fights, as much as a quarter of the crowd would be female and within this group, a quarter of them would be holding back so as not to bring attention to their wedding fingers.

At twenty-six Marek was still unmarried, a fact which troubled his mother. Gdansk's Polish population appeared to be growing by the day; attracted to the old city by the traditional docking, brewing and amber markets, but also by the administration posts which appeared to be shooting up all over. With this influx of men the native girls were being snapped up quickly. Marek was unfazed by his mother's concerns, knowing that he could attract any pani or pana whenever and wherever he chose. He preferred to act upon his father's advice, stay single for as long as he could, have his share of the girls and concentrate on his wrestling. What was the point in being tied down? It had never done his dad any favours. The good life at the moment was very good, he could do what he wanted when he wanted. He had a strong group of friends who appeared to adore him almost as much as the girls did; this was not a bear that could be captured and Marek intended on keeping it that way. He had once been told (probably by his mother, who spoke all sorts of nonsense) that 'as long as a woman is desired she does not get old'. This is how he felt about himself. Why should this privilege be reserved for the women? He was as desired as any girl in the city.

Only two people as far as Marek could figure, that did not desire him were his mother and his kid brother Miroslaw. Never in the history of Great Gdansk had the city been possessed of two brothers so different from each other. To look upon them

through foreign eyes you would not conceive that they could be related, let alone born of the same womb. Set against Marek's raw good looks and strong appearance, Miroslaw's slight yet tall frame and pasty complexion paled into insignificance. The younger man's locks of bright red hair made him seem anything but a native Slav; any western Celt visiting this part of the world could have mistaken him for one of their own. Everything about the two young men was at odds, as well as their looks their temperaments were also entirely different. Where Marek would pile in with his fists flaying and occasionally think of his actions afterwards, Miroslaw would consider all possibilities and then usually make the right choice, as was the case in an incident that involved the two of them when they were just boys.

Marek was eighteen and already, despite his young years, felt himself to be the man of the house. Pawel was rarely there anymore; after days spent loading and unloading foreign ships he would turn his attention to his own internal vessel, filling it as much as was possible with Germanic ale. After his own drunken night out Marek arrived home to find a couple of the local German lads sneaking around the back of the family home; like most of the native Poles Marek had a deep-rooted, if little understood hatred of the Germans of the city and here was an opportunity for a little fun. Believing himself virtually untouchable, Marek went straight for the heroic move, sneaking up behind the two (who up close appeared to be mere boys) he hid behind Pawel's half-built garden wall, before revealing himself in dramatic style. Running at them full pace, Marek came crashing down on top of the larger of the two, who turned just in time to see eighty-five kilos of bear come tumbling down upon him. Not wanting to join the grizzly sandwich his accomplice fled with Marek pounding after him.

From his bedroom fifteen year old Miroslaw had heard the commotion, he had initially been woken (as usual) by the drunken “singing” of his idiotic elder brother; it was always him or pop slaughtering the songs of independence, this was usual. But the crescendo of cracking bones and piercing German screams were enough to rouse Miroslaw from his sleep and straight to the window overlooking his family’s backyard. A boy of around his age was sprawled on the ground, blood on his lips, he was still screaming and his leg appeared bent out of shape facing away from its companion. Certain that his brother had been involved, Miroslaw thought the worst. Apart from the now reducing screams of the injured boy everything was still and dark. Suddenly Marek’s own wails reverberated in the night air. Despite his size Marek was often getting himself into bother and these screams were familiar to Miroslaw. They were closely followed by what seemed at least ten large German men brandishing all sorts of weaponry. Realising that his brother “The Bear” was likely to be at the bottom of the scrum Miroslaw tumbled into the first set of clothes that he could find and ran at speed away from the commotion, escaping through the back tunnel that had last been put to meaningful use during the war.

There were only two people that you went to when you were in trouble, one was the local constabulary and the other was the only real option for a Pole in Gdansk. Gmina Polska was where most Poles in the city turned in desperate times. Since the creation of the free city (which was supposed to give opportunity to the Poles in the area), the authorities had only become increasingly Germanic. Little opportunity was given to the Polish residents; Gmina Polska was set up by the Poles for the Poles, a sort of community within a community.

Miroslaw nearly unhinged the doors of the community centre; the night-watch knew he was coming before his shock of red hair erupted into the room.

‘It’s Marek, it’s Marek, the Germans have him, it’s Marek, My brother, please come quickly it’s Marek’. This was not the first time Marek had got himself in trouble, the boys in the centre were tired of his exploits, but Miroslaw was a good kid and did not deserve it. The lads of the town were rounded up and Marek was saved once again. It was not the perfect solution, but considering the limited time and resources young Miroslaw had proved himself as a clear thinker who got the job done, something that did not go unnoticed by the Gmina.

Where Marek was his father’s son, Miroslaw was most definitely the pearl in his mother’s purse. She doted on him completely, knew she could trust him, a fact that was made very clear to his elder sibling. Now twenty-three Miroslaw had grown into a tall man, he was still as skinny as one of Agata’s broom handles and his red hair was brighter than ever. He stood a good head above most other men as he always had done over the boys of his age, but most importantly he towered over his brother. Unfortunately though what he had in height he lacked in almost every other physical attribute. Growing up he was the skinniest boy in his town and despite the fact that there was little money to spare other mothers would stop Agata in the street and offer food for her starving child.

Agata was devoted to her son and so saw nothing wrong; she would simply turn to the women and state quite matter of fact

‘He eats, he eats’ and would pinch his cheek (the only available fleshy part) and offer up this measly portion as proof that her boy was the physical equivalent of theirs. Despite his mother’s blinkered vision of him, Miroslaw was and had always been a lad that stood out in this community of dark haired tanned residents; because of this it was sometimes joked that Agata had spent a little too much time with the German officials who dominated the city.

Unlike his wife, Pawel could see little good in the boy. Having been a man that had got through his life lifting, pulling, sweating and fighting, especially fighting, he had decided from an early age that the boy needed pulling out from his mother's skirts and threw him, sometimes literally, into the wrestling ring; there was nothing that Agata could do to change his mind. So at fourteen years old this oversized, underfed, copper-topped boy found himself standing in a ridiculously small spandex outfit, next to lads with arms thicker than his trunk. He was instantly given the nickname 'Sparrow' and laughed at when he attempted anything even remotely technical. Miroslaw was not the most coordinated of kids to put it politely. This was clearly not the sport for him and with physical threats ringing in his ears from his mortified elder brother Miroslaw, hung up his leotard and turned his attentions to the chess team. Pawel despaired and Agata scowled, but inside she was pleased. She had always wanted a girl.

Miroslaw was not a boy born to live the life that his father wanted him to and so Pawel had to settle for just the one son of whom he could be proud. What his dad could not see was that Miroslaw was in fact an exceptionally talented child who would grow into an even more talented man. Only Agata knew his real potential and now that her interfering husband was tired of his project, she had all the opportunity she needed to nurture his real talents.

CHAPTER 2

Maria Nowicki was beautiful. This is a statement that is dispatched all too frequently; every mother thinks her daughter the prettiest, every father sees his little girl through love-tinted eyes and every lover would rather gaze at the face of his beloved than that of any other. This is natural, if not always true. Nonetheless where Maria was concerned there could be no doubt; mothers wished that she was theirs, fathers were relieved that she was not and lovers' heads (so usually fixed) were turned.

Maria's eyes shone. To say that a lady's eyes shone is now such a cliché that it is impossible to hear it uttered without grimacing, but here no other description can be used. In literature eyes are said to shine like the stars; Maria's eyes did not, they shone like eyes, like only the most beautiful eyes can shine. It is such a rare thing that most of us do not know that eyes really can glint and twinkle. In the most blessed of God's creatures, eyes can soak up the light around them and reflect it back upon all those that they encounter and from that moment on enrich their lives. Even with this description you cannot possibly conceive how beautiful Maria was, so it is necessary to continue.

Long hair of a colour that has yet to be named, for it is too beautiful, too pure, ran silkily down her slender and unblemished back. Here I know the hair that you are thinking of and I am sorry to say that you are wrong. You are thinking of the straight milk bathed locks of Cleopatra, or the dark curls of the great Polish Duchess Gertruda, you are thinking of these because your mind conjures them up when instructed to imagine the hair of the most glorious of women. These images you can cope with. Although you would though not remain sane if that same mind projected to you the richness of splendour that was the hair that floated down from and around Maria Nowicki. Men who have seen it dare not spend a moment longer than they can

possibly help thinking of it, for fear that their brains will be overcome with emotion and forget their usual tasks of keeping their hosts alive and upright. I have spoken enough, I am sure though that you now understand all I have said about Maria. Do not let yourself forget her, because Maria was Maria, Maria was beauty personified, but unfortunately for Mirosław Zielinski, Maria was also a bitch.

They had met as the new summer blew in over 1935, Constitution Day, the most important civic holiday in all of old Poland. This was not a day that was officially celebrated in Gdansk, much to the displeasure of the newly arrived compatriots. The older generation just accepted it and raised their glasses from behind closed doors to the memories of stories once told to them about heroic fighters full of national pride and sense of belonging that now seemed literally foreign.

The unofficial holiday was on a Saturday in the year in question, giving the small minority of Polish Jews in the city double cause for celebration. Mirosław had no real thoughts on the day, born a Polish Catholic but in the period when Poland was just a historical concept. He had been bounced around amongst his parents and their friends when the war had ended in 1918, they were so convinced that a Poland none of them had seen would be renewed and that they would be a part of it. To this extent they were half-way correct, as citizens of Danzig (or Gdansk as it was known in the whispers of the Polish quarter) they expected the famous old city to be reunited with her former lands of the east. They bade a not so fond farewell to their German neighbours, who had treated them with such contempt for so long and re-told long-forgotten tales of Polish folklore. The dust-ridden flags were dug up and rolled out and even the elders of the community allowed themselves just a little hope that one day they would die as Polish citizens on Polish soil with their forefathers and mothers of old. Within two years, with the formation of the Free City, all hopes were dashed.

That summer for Miroslaw was a happy one, despite the obvious problems of being a Pole in Nazi Danzig; things were starting to work out for him. After two years of bombarding them with letters the Gdansk Technical University (as it was known by the Poles) finally accepted him as a Literature student. His teacher and mentor Dr Pniewski had been his inspiration, in Miroslaw's eyes no greater man existed in all of Pomerania; for years he had held faith in Miroslaw and encouraged him with his writing, it was he who first put the idea into his head to apply to the university. There was no way that Miroslaw thought that he would be accepted and even if he was, the fees were extortionate, if some of the German families struggled then how would his parents cope? Dr Pniewski stood firm, saying that he was sure that Miroslaw was good enough and that *when* he got accepted he would find a way to get around the problem of the fees.

He was as good as his word for after two years and one rejection Miroslaw held in his hand the letter that he felt would change his life; Dr Pniewski held in his hand another one. This letter was not addressed to Miroslaw, despite being its subject.

'It's from Warsaw, from the society' Pniewski said as he greeted the youngster waving the letter

'Society, what society?'

'The one that has just saved you from a life on the docks. *The Society for Assistance to Polish Students of the Gdansk Technical University*, to give them their exact title'

He had done it again; without Miroslaw's knowledge he had applied to Warsaw for funding for his young protégée.

That summer nothing mattered to Miroslaw but the university, he would walk past it every day, stopping outside to gaze up at its large old walls, looking lustfully

through the marbled archways leading to the Nineteenth Century imitation church windows, wishing that he was on the other side of them. Quite often he was moved on by the garrison accused of loitering, but even this left him unconcerned, soon he would be within those walls and there was nothing that they could do to keep him out. It was on one of these many visits that Maria Nowicki first appeared in his life. It was early evening and after a half-day at work both Pawel and Marek were already drunk celebrating Constitution. It meant nothing to them; Marek claimed it made him feel proud, but when questioned he could not even tell Miroslaw which year it had been signed; it was just another excuse to get drunk. Their exploits were more than Miroslaw could take and despite feeling guilty, he left his poor mother to deal with them on her own.

Maria had appeared out of nowhere, as always he had been lost in thought gazing like a fool in love, imagining far away classrooms and libraries, when she tapped him on the shoulder; it took a second to register her. He turned around expecting the usual Nazi police-guard and was surprised to see a young girl staring back at him. He had no idea what to make of her, especially as to start with she just looked at him saying nothing. He presumed she must be beautiful, her face was pure white, not dark like so many of the other girls of the community, she wore red lipstick and her eyes seemed quite unnaturally to glisten like sun-kissed water. Still she stared,

‘Erm can I... help y-you?’ Miroslaw stuttered as the girl moved even closer to him, so that he could now smell the sweet womanly scent of her perfume (it reminded him of his mother).

‘You’re Miroslaw, aren’t you?’ her voice was strange seeming too deep and assertive for a woman.

‘Y-yes how do y... I mean who are you? How do you know my name?’ she did not reply, just stood close holding his gaze, far too intensely for Miroslaw’s liking.

‘They say’ she finally replied ‘that you are brilliant’ a long uncomfortable silence followed before she continued, ‘they say that in all of Gdansk there isn’t a writer to touch you, that you write from the heart in ways that most men could not conceive of.’

Miroslaw was stunned, he simply knew of no way to reply, so he just stood there dumb, all he was aware of was how uncomfortable and completely self-conscious he felt in her presence. Right at that moment Miroslaw felt his hair to be redder, his skin paler, his eyes bluer and his body to be skinnier and taller than ever before, he was also aware that his cheeks had now turned a sort of sunset rouge. The girl (for she was no older than Miroslaw, despite how she made him feel) continued to look on, unblinking, into his blue eyes that he disliked so much, although now she had a wide grin on her face showing a full set of gleaming white teeth, no other Pole, it seemed to Miroslaw, had teeth quite like them.

Suddenly there was no time to respond, the guards, who Miroslaw had not realised had been watching, approached. The larger of the two curled his meaty fingers around Miroslaw’s shoulder and laughed in that way that only the Germans could, as the other ran his much smaller hands all over the girl’s back. Without thinking, she had turned and slapped him as hard as she could manage across the face. Miroslaw was aghast; he had never seen anyone, let alone a Pole stand up to the Germans. Before he could stop himself he began laughing, he could not help it, the situation was so ridiculous, to see this policeman being bashed around the head by such a small girl tickled him immensely.

Unfortunately the guards did not get the joke and within seconds Miroslaw was on the ground with a thick black SS book on his neck. The pain was immense, he felt as though he was going to suffocate, they were shouting at him in German; like most Poles in Gdansk his German was good, but the shock of the situation, coupled with the lack of air left him lost, he had no idea what they were barking at him. Through blurred eyes he could see the girl being wrestled away by the other guard. Miroslaw watched in awe as she struggled against the brute-force of her oppressor whilst he just laid there accepting his fate. From nowhere he heard a voice and surprisingly to him, it was his.

‘What’s your name?’

‘Silence’ bellowed the German on his neck in his native tongue. She had obviously inspired some confidence in him as he once again shouted out:

‘Please what’s your name?’ This was too much and he was hauled to his feet and dragged away, leaving the girl free to escape.

‘Maria’ she called back, her voice seemed suspended in the air, for that brief second Miroslaw felt safe, almost weightless, until he was brought literally crashing back down to Earth as the two men dropped him once more to the turf. Then, everything went black.

CHAPTER 3

The morning of the wedding began as every other morning did for Miroslaw; he had expected that he would somehow feel excited, the way that he did as a child on his Saint's day, but on this morning he felt nothing. He got up and dressed and as usual, the weather was unrelenting. It had been hot all summer and he had hoped that by having the ceremony in September it would have died down a little, but the day was as warm as each had been for the last three months.

Marek had stayed over in Miroslaw's house. He had only recently bought the place with the help of Dr Pniewski, who had said that a man and his wife needed to have a home of their own and so had helped him financially as much as was possible. Agata had also chipped in despite her reservations about Maria. It was a beautiful little cottage near to the university where Miroslaw had now been studying for the last two years. Maria had loved it as soon as she had seen it and was even happier when she had found out that they hadn't had to pay any money towards the place. Miroslaw was just pleased that she was pleased, which she was and could not wait to move in.

Marek was Miroslaw's obvious choice of best man, despite the fact that they rarely got on and spent little time together, he was the only man that Miroslaw could genuinely say that he knew well and that also in turn knew him. He had a few friends, some from his childhood, but most of these had grown away from him, they were now all working with his brother on the docks, out of work or worse in a German run prison; a place Miroslaw knew only too well and had no desire ever to return to.

The only other option that he had in terms of a best man was a fellow academic at the university, he was a young German about two years Miroslaw's junior, called Fritz; he'd had been brought up in Danzig and considered himself a native of the free city in a way that most of the Polish community (at least under that

name) just couldn't. They sat together in the cafeteria; it was generally discouraged by the faculty for Germans and Poles to commune in such places, as the teaching staff believed the Polish students to be inferior to their great German boys. Fritz was quite different from most and was rarely welcomed when the large groups of them took over the sports hall for their afternoon meals. They would convene and act as though drunk and talk of the girls in the city in a way that upset Fritz more than he liked to let on, they would also make crude jokes which he was often the butt of.

Fritz was studying the sort of technology that gave the university its name and which Mirosław could not possibly hope to understand. Despite their very differing subjects the pair had a lot in common; ironically the thing that brought them closest was their shared inability to make friends in their own social peer groups.

Maria disliked Fritz; she blamed this seemingly irrational hatred on his being German, as far as she was concerned the only good German was a dead German. Mirosław believed she was just quoting her father, who, like all Gdansk Poles of his generation (like Mirosław's own father) seemed to have no time for the Germans. Mirosław liked to think that he saw past this bigotry to which he himself was so often subjected, he also knew that deep down Maria did as well. She was an intelligent girl who understood the history of the city and the need for the two communities to pull together rather than be separated by prejudice. But where Fritz was concerned she was a closed book, every mention of him was met with a scowl. Mirosław could not understand it, believing that she was jealous of the time that the two men spent in each other's company; which was a lot.

For the first time in Mirosław's life he had found a true friend, one who understood him. It was a relief to have someone with whom he could talk without the subject of politics and the troubles coming up. There was so much violence, pent up

hatred and prejudice from all the different sections of the city. The new Germans hated the old Germans, who in turn hated the old Poles, the group to which Miroslaw's family belonged and he knew from personal experience that this hatred was reciprocated. He also knew that his community hated the Jews and even more than the Jews, hated the new Poles with their expensive Warsaw clothing and voices full of education and derision. With Fritz none of this seemed to matter, Fritz liked everyone, even Maria.

Their first meeting had been soon after the fateful day on which he had first met his future wife, the day that was forever etched in Miroslaw's memory over all others. Maria had managed to escape the guards who were far more concerned with the odd looking Polish lad who was lying on the floor and openly mocking them. They would have enjoyed nothing more than an evening's fun with Maria who had seemed like a girl that would put up a good fight, a bit of a contest was always so much more desirable than the ones who just accepted it without a struggle. But this time she would have to wait, there was no way that they could let this impudent piece of Polish dirt get away with blatantly questioning their authority in public, the stigma would have been too much, word would have got back to the boys at the barracks and the drinks would have been on them for weeks. No here they had to make a stand; they dragged him through the streets back to the station where he would really see why the SS was not to be laughed at.

Miroslaw had woken feeling what he could only imagine must be a hangover, his father and Marek were always complaining of them and despite the fact that he rarely socialised, suspected that somehow he must have been out drinking, there could be no other excuse for how badly his head was hurting. It took at least thirty seconds for his eyes to adjust, he had no idea where he was, there was very little light in the

room and what could be seen was clouded with a thick layer of cigarette smoke which seemed to be being pumped in under the thick steel door. The walls were a dirty white with outlines of the solid sturdy brick that lay beneath the paintwork quite visible and the ceiling was low with a seemingly broken fan hanging directly above one of only two moveable objects in the room. This was a long black table, which could not be described as anything else, although Miroslaw suspected that its real role was that of a bed, as a dirty grey sheet was curled up at its far end. The other object in the room was a bucket, which had a worse smell than anything he had ever encountered before and Miroslaw had lived with his brother for many years. He found that he was lying on the floor at the far corner of what he could only imagine must be a cell. He suddenly became aware of the deep-voiced laughter that had begun to filter into the room along with the smoke; it was the same laughter that he had heard at the university. It all came back to him, no wonder his head pounded, he remembered briefly looking up to see the shiny black glove come flying down towards his face and after that, nothing. Putting his tongue to lips he could taste blood.

This was bad; the harassment of Poles had recently been on the increase, the Nazis were on the back of the successful Free-City elections victory where they had been only six seats shy of a controlling majority in the Sejm and they were determined to make sure that the “foreigners” of the city knew who was *now* in charge. It was the first time, apart from being moved on from the university that Miroslaw had had any serious contact with them and he was now regretting laughing at Maria. The thought of her brought him back to his senses; how was she? He hoped that she had got away, it had seemed like it, but he could not be sure.

In fact he shouldn't have worried; Maria was fine and delighting in telling the story of her heroics to the sweaty worker boys at the docks. Marek was away on one

of the ships when she arrived and returned to see her standing in a circle of at least five of his colleagues telling stories and touching biceps.

‘What are you doing here?’ he shouted at her from across the yard, everyone stopped as “the bear” came thundering towards them, parting the men as he went ‘Why are you here? Are you trying to show me up? This is where I work, get away from them’ Maria stepped towards him, displaying none of the fear that she felt inside ‘I came here to see you Marek, I came here to see you’

‘Get away from here, I told you I didn’t want to see you again, you were just a... one off, you meant... nothing, stop harassing me’. Maria was devastated, she had really liked Marek and despite the fact that he’d been a pre-arranged target she’d regrettably fallen for him. She knew she had to persist.

‘It’s your brother’. Marek was confused, he spent a very small percentage of his time thinking of his younger sibling and when he did it was usually on the back of his mother’s nagging to look after him or include him more

‘Miroslaw, What do you know of him?’

‘I’ll tell you’ Maria coolly replied, holding his eye ‘if you just calm down and come with me’

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Maria was not originally from the province, she had grown up in Dresden, Germany; the daughter of Jerzey a Danzig Pole who had taken an opportunity to get out of a city he felt was being run into the ground by selfish politicians. Whilst there he had met Maria’s mother, Heidi and within two years had been married. The day that she had become pregnant was the happiest in his life and he expected that this would only be bettered by the day when his future German child would be born. He’d longed his whole life to be German, having grown up amongst the wealth of the

Prussians of his home city. He watched them, jealously hoping that someday he would have something of what they did. Now with his German wife, carrying his German baby, Jerzey felt that he was finally close to fulfilling his goal.

Maria had been born on the fourteenth of May 1917, during a war from which he and most of the others around him were sure that Germany would return victorious; he had called her Maria as a tip of the hat to a past that he had now all but forgotten. For nearly two years everything was good, his bookshop was thriving and despite the unexpected defeat in the war his new found life was working out as planned. Then it all went wrong; in the early winter of 1919 Heidi became ill, initially they had brushed it off as nothing, but as time passed she became weak and forgetful, quite often neglecting to take care of Maria. Jerzey would return from work to find her slumped against the stairs, with the baby crawling around the house, unfed in nothing but a soiled towel. He took her to the hospital but they had left it too late, the illness was far gone and in the late spring of that year his beautiful German wife was dead.

The years that followed proved tough, a single father, with a business to run he was forced to spend more and more time away from his work. By the time that Maria was twelve, Jerzey was almost desolate, things had taken a massive downturn for him and despite the fact that he now felt himself German in all aspects, he once again looked at the true natives through green eyes, as the great financial opportunities of the twenties passed him by. The depression of 1930 only made things worse, his shop, which had been financially gutted over the last decade, finally closed as the locals preferred to spend their marks on food rather than books.

It was about this time that Jerzey first became aware of the National Socialists, the Worker's Party or Nazis as they were known. An organisation that promised to

look after the rights of the workers and increase the amount of skilled and unskilled jobs in the area had to be a good thing. They also promoted the downfall of the Jewish community; Jerzey had never really been that aware of Dresden's Jewish population, they were there but not there, he felt that he had little to do with them, but hearing the Nazi's speak he realised that it was almost certainly down to them that he had struggled to maintain his business throughout the last twelve years. When he thought about it, it all made sense, they ran most of the businesses, exclusively employed their own and then squirreled away their profits, only spending them in other Jewish shops; suddenly things became clear to him, he enrolled as a member as soon as he could.

Maria had been brought up German, why wouldn't she have been? Jerzey felt little patriotism for a country which was only recently formed and had been more of a fairytale place to him as a child, a Poland known of only in stories. So it was natural and, more importantly a legal requirement that she should join the Jungmadel the female branch of the Hitler Youth. She was allowed to join despite her Polish roots, which was a testament to Jerzey's patriotism. Upon her fourteenth birthday she graduated to the Bund Deutscher Madel (German Girl's League); there was nowhere Maria felt happier, she had her own uniform, set of responsibilities and was seen as the equal of any other in the group. Jerzey was also now a recognised member of the party, as were so many of his peers; despite his Polish routes, he had sworn total allegiance to the Fuhrer and the cause and had been totally accepted. So much so that in the summer of 1933, soon after their great election victory Jerzey was summoned to the party headquarters in Berlin. Maria had recently turned sixteen and Jerzey considered her now old enough to look after herself, so despite the abundance of local boys who seemed to a little too interested in her for his liking, she was left at home in

Dresden as he made his way to the nation's capital, unsure of what to expect upon his arrival.

~

Marek agreed to go with Maria; it was the second time she'd been spotted hanging around the docks. The last time he had been first on the scene, his reputation would not have allowed for anything else. She was beautiful and instantly responsive to the lines that he used on all the girls, they were not the best, but when you looked as good as he did, they did not need to be. Another reason he had liked her was that she knew who he was, calling him by name without the need for an introduction. His reputation obviously ran ahead of him, he did not need to ask her how she knew he just took it as read that she had searched out The Bear. Now upon finding him she was intent on having him; which she did, over and over as it happened, so much so that Marek had to take the rest of the day off work simply to recover. Now he was alone with her he wanted it all over again, the charade on the docks had been just for the boys, he knew when he was onto a good thing. First he needed to know what all this rubbish concerning Miroslaw was about, how could she have anything to do with that skinny runt?

'Go on then' he fired at her, trying to maintain his hard persona. She just stood silent, frustrating Marek intensely, he was not used to people not instantly doing as he wanted. 'Come on, you've pulled me away from my work, sprouted some lies concerning Miroslaw, what's it all about?'... Still nothing, Marek was on the point of bursting, he could tell that she was enjoying this.

'Your brother' she finally replied 'has been arrested by the guards down at the university' Marek's first response was to laugh out loud

‘Arrested, what can Miroslaw have possibly done?’ This was not the response that she wanted. In order to get close to Miroslaw she needed it to be seen that she had helped with his release.

‘Marek this is serious, you need to help get him, out you don’t know what those German bastards are like’.

If anything was going to push Marek’s buttons it was this, he knew exactly what they were like, which was why he and fifty or so others had joined forces as a sort of vigilante group monitoring the authorities’ treatment of the Poles. They had gone around sometimes openly, sometimes underground, running under the name of Związek Polaków (The Union of Poles), despite protests from the actual union who bore this name who felt they were doing more harm than good.

The tactic worked and Marek agreed that they needed to get Miroslaw out; his plan was to round up the group and try breaking him out, possibly even that night. Maria had a better idea.

‘Why don’t we speak to the guards at the university, I know I could get their attention, maybe we could come to an arrangement with them’

‘Money... do you mean money? I am not spending my hard-earned gulden getting that twerp out of prison’ Maria couldn’t help but laugh

‘Did I say money? I’m sure given my err... talents the guards will look favourably upon our little Miroslaw’ This was fine with Marek, he had sampled these particular talents and agreed that if he was in the guard’s position then it would probably work on him, also it meant that he didn’t have to do too much. They arranged to meet the next day.

Marek wandered slowly back to the dock chuckling to himself, it was the first time that he could remember when Miroslaw was in more trouble than he was, it was

a good feeling and he was determined to savour it for as long as possible. He was still smiling when he noticed that all the other lads were looking at him

‘What? What it is it?’ he asked nervously

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At Berlin Jerzey was met off the train by the usual stern-faced guards; here in the capital they appeared to him to be far harsher than those he was used to in Dresden. Despite their manner he felt relaxed, he was a trusted member of the party and felt at home, this was where he belonged, his city in his country. The journey to the Reich was undertaken in one of the usual characterless, black Volkswagens that were seen everywhere; Jerzey thought them powerful and majestic. He tried to make friendly conversation with the two guards whom he considered as comrades, but with no response from either, opted to relax into his seat and enjoy the majesty of Berlin, presuming them just not the chatty sort.

Jerzey was ordered into a waiting room; he had just enough time to take in his surroundings, which were vast. On every wall was the new flag, Germany’s flag and beneath every flag was a picture of the Fuhrer himself; he wondered if Hitler spent much time here and if he did could he be here right at this moment, at the same time as himself? The thought was awe-inspiring. He was the only person in the large waiting area and felt that every noise he made was being amplified throughout the building. Finally after more than two hours of waiting (of which he had not minded a single second) he was called in through the large oak door that lay ahead of him.

Behind the grand desk in yet another overly decorated room sat a small stocky man, with round-rimmed glasses and a Munich accent, who neither greeted him on his arrival nor bid him farewell as he left, but what he did say was enough to depress Jerzey to the core of his being.

~

Behind the group of smirking, gawping co-workers Marek could make out Herr Freund; Günter Freund had been the docks manager since the end of the war and excelled in his job. He had initially seen the post as a great chance to better himself and get out of a Germany that he felt was stifling him. This position in the new Free City was too good an opportunity to turn down. Seventeen years later he was still enjoying his work and felt that he had given it his all. His dream was to one day pass on his responsibilities to his young son Fritz, who had recently turned eighteen and was showing signs that he too would be a good and fair manager like his father.

‘Now then young Marek’ Herr Freund finally called out as the troublesome young Pole cockily made his way over to him ‘Can I ask? And I only ask, because as far as I was aware you were supposed to be working, what you were doing chatting to that girl? Maybe and I’m sorry if this is the case, you have a perfectly good reason for leaving your colleagues to do all your work, but if so I would like to hear it’. Marek could not speak, he usually had an answer for everything but when it came to Herr Freund he was dumbstruck, even in this situation he would normally mouth off and spurt out something that he would later regret. Here there was nothing to say, the talking had all been done previously and Marek knew that he was on his final warning and would now most likely be fired. His last option was to reveal the truth; tell Freund (a German) about Miroslaw’s problem and then hope that this would be enough to save his job.

‘S-sir’ Marek replied softly, surprising himself by the nervousness of his voice ‘It’s my brother, M-Miroslaw’. Günter was not a cruel boss, he liked to think that as much as he expected hard work from the lads, he also felt that they deserved his

respect in return, unlike so many of the other German employers in the city; so if it was a family matter then he was prepared to listen.

‘What about your brother?’ he replied softly to the unusually shaky looking Marek. Marek had no choice and explained the whole situation to him, although he decided against mentioning how he had met Maria in the first place. As much as Freund appeared to be in a lenient mood, Marek doubted he would look too kindly on what else had been going on during working hours.

Despite his German roots, Günter felt a personal sympathy for the Poles of the city. They were a clear minority and treated that way by the Germans, forced to do the majority of the manual-labour work in the area, either that or they were unemployed as the ever increasing Germanic population squeezed them out to the peripheral areas of the city. Despite the fact that this was originally their land going back to the first millennium and the times of St Wojciech, they were treated as though they did not belong. Even the creation of the free city, which was meant to be the beginning of a process to give Danzig or Gdansk as it should be called, back to the Poles, had not really helped their cause. All that had happened was that more and more Germans had come into the city (himself included) and taken the most important jobs; something that the League of Nations was supposed to act against, although Danzig did not seem to be on their list of priorities. So because of what he saw all around him and because he felt slightly guilty, as he himself was one of the those that had come in and prospered, Günter aimed to help out the Poles as much as he could. Which is why the following day at 10am he found himself inside the offices of the Seym waiting for an appointment with Dr. Crusen?

~

Having been escorted back to the station, Jerzey boarded the train to Dresden sitting in stunned silence for the whole journey, contemplating what lay ahead of him.

Maria was against it, she loved her life in Dresden and was starting to build up a bit of a fan club of girls that wanted to be her and boys that wanted to have her, there was no way that she wanted to move east to a middle of nowhere city, away from her friends and most importantly away from Germany. Danzig was just not where she saw herself right now, but Jerzey was insistent, just as the little man in the round-rimmed spectacles had been with him. Although neither of them liked it, there was no option; they were heading back to Danzig.

~

Günter believed the time was right for Fritz to get a bit of life experience and to appreciate a little more how the adult world actually worked in preparation for the day when he would succeed him. He therefore decided that he would involve the boy in the mission that he was planning to get the unfortunate Miroslaw Zielinski out of prison.

Miroslaw felt as though he had been held captive in his cell for months, despite the fact that it was actually less than a week. The days all seemed to melt into one another, only broken up by the hours' exercise that he was allowed in the yard every afternoon, followed by the hours of punishment that it also seemed that he was entitled to after it. So it came as a surprise to him when one morning shortly after waking, he heard keys being rattled on the other side of his door. It was too early for breakfast, if that is what it could be called and even then that was always placed through the hatch at the bottom. No this was different; initially scared because even in his short time spent in the jail, he had become a little institutionalised and was beginning to dislike any sort of change. At least with the routine of breakfast,

exercise, beatings, dinner and bed he knew where he was, knew that no matter how bad it got, this process would not change, he was used to it, expected it and could cope with it.

The door opened and a tall, pasty man walked in slowly, looking like he had not eaten in a week. He approached Miroslaw who was cowering under the grey sheet; it had become a sort of comfort blanket. The man looked straight at him, Miroslaw tried with everything he had to hold this new character's gaze but failed miserably. Never being one for direct contact, his head nuzzled down further into his grey protector.

'Miroslaw Zielinski?' The man asked; Miroslaw thought this a ridiculous question, if it was one. Of course he was who else would he be?

'Yes, who are you?' The new man (who Miroslaw had just realised was no older than he was) was silent a moment checking the door, as though the inanimate object itself could be listening.

'Fritz' he finally whispered 'and Mr Zielinski' he continued 'I'm your ticket out of here'.

Miroslaw said nothing, just accepted this new twist in the curious world of fate and followed the ungainly looking fellow out of the cell. It must have been early because as they walked down the corridor, which had so recently become familiar to him, not a guard was in sight, not one. Usually the place was buzzing with them watching him being taken to and from his "exercise" with a look of hunger and menace in their eyes. Come to think of it, this new lad looked nothing like one of them either; he was not even wearing a uniform. However, this was not the time for questions and so Miroslaw followed the curious stranger past the duty officer's station, where once again no guard sat and out of the front gates. He paused

momentarily to pick up a bundle seemingly left for them, which he soon realised were his own clothes.

Once outside another man greeted them, much older than Fritz but with that similar friendly look in his eyes, a look that Miroslaw felt that he had not seen in a while, a look that said *it's ok I won't hurt you, you're safe with me*. As the gates shut behind them, the man pulled him near.

'Say nothing' he whispered in the same way that Fritz had spoken to him in the cell, 'put your head down and get in the car, you've nothing to fear'. Miroslaw knew nothing of cars; Marek was fascinated with them and could have told him everything about this one, but even he could tell that the vehicle that he was being ushered into was a good one.

Inside the car Miroslaw was astonished to see a new man, smiling at him in the driver's mirror

'Hello kid' he said, in just about the friendliest tone that Miroslaw had ever heard his brother use toward him,

'fancy my little brother getting into trouble. Prison no less, God Miroslaw when you do something you don't half do it properly, those German scum pick me up everyday but I've never ended up in there'. Realising who he was in the car with Marek added

'No offence guys'.

'None taken' the older man replied in return, before switching his attention to the younger of the brothers

'Miroslaw, I can see that you are a little confused, don't worry, we are here to help you, that's why I have brought your brother along, to show you that you can trust us' (usually this would have done little to allay his fears, but here at least he felt safe).

‘My name is Günter and you have already met my son Fritz’ Fritz gave a nervous nod of the head in Mirosław’s direction before returning his gaze to the streets outside.

‘I do not want you to worry about anything. We are headed back to my house it’s not far from the dock-yard, where I will explain everything, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy your freedom’. This, Mirosław decided was probably the best option, he had so many questions, but for now was just pleased to be free, so he supposed his concerns could wait, he leant back on the padded head rest and was asleep within seconds.

Maria had watched it all take place; she had decided that a morning start was probably best, always good to get in early when people were less worn-out and more likely to want to brighten the dreary day that lay ahead of them. Marek had been supposed to meet her, that’s what they had agreed, but he was nowhere to be seen. She would have to go ahead without him, time was at a premium and she had none to lose. The guard that she had decided that she would work her charms upon was staring straight ahead outside the main gate. He seemed to Maria to be about forty-five to fifty years old, slightly overweight and with the red nose that she had seen on so many of her father’s Nazi friends back in Dresden. *One too many drunken celebrations for that one* she thought. In her head she pictured him like all the others, probably spent more time on “official” matters than he had done with his wife, who had probably had enough years ago and left taking a couple of Hitler’s future fighters with her. He would be perfect and Marek or no Marek she had to go ahead with this now. She was the predator and her prey was in her sights. This would be too easy. She risked a smile.

Just as she was about to pounce, a green 1932 Mercedes Benz pulled up, its driver shielded by the sunshine that obscured the left-hand side window. Her father had lusted after these cars back in Germany and she rarely saw one nowadays; Danzig was not a place that seemed to keep in touch with the fashionable world which Maria was used to. As she became lost in a dream of childhood, two of the car's doors opened simultaneously. Out of the front appeared a smartly dressed older man who Maria took for German, the locals surely could not dress so well; out of the back door stepped a shy looking boy, the type that Maria normally stayed away from, they were rarely much fun; she took him for the son of the well-dressed gent and immediately disliked him. The driver seemed content to stay within the vehicle hidden behind early morning rays.

Then to her surprise and distinct annoyance, the older man approached her target. She had been sizing him up for her attack when this new huntsman just pulled up and went in for the kill. The men chatted for what seemed like an age before an envelope was exchanged and quickly deposited within the grand coat of the plump guard. Maria's gaze followed the envelope's new owner as far as she could. He left his post and about turned into the prison, only to reappear a few minutes later with at least six other guards; there could have been more, she was too stunned to count. As far as she was concerned this could not be going any worse. Then, of all people the small quirky looking boy made his way, undisturbed in through the front entrance, with all the importance of the warden himself. The Fuhrer could not have strolled in with more assurance. Maria watched on, the father of the boy stood silently outside, checking his wristwatch on more than one occasion, she noted how nervous he seemed. Neither he nor the boy had seen her. She had been waiting some distance off, hidden in the shadows. Here she had a little in common with the driver, who, for no

reason that she could ascertain, intrigued her. Finally the lad returned, but to Maria's dismay this time left with an acquaintance, she was sure from the distance that the new fellow in question was none other than Mirosław; she could have spotted that shock of red hair anywhere.

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Inside a month Jerzey had arrived in Danzig. Maria hated it instantly, everything had seemed so dowdy, the houses, the cars, the people, especially the people. Jerzey felt differently, he had expected to be repelled by the city which he had once called home, but upon his return he had found it almost completely changed. For a start he now felt that he was finally in the majority, seeing himself as more German than the Danzigers who would claim that great country as their own. Also standing here now he felt as if he had never left Germany; the Fuhrer was everywhere, the great socialist flag was displayed from every window and only the old Poles seemed to hang onto the city that he remembered. Even the Jews appeared fewer in number.

They were set up in a modest cottage on the outskirts of the Polish quarter, a situation that grieved Jerzey greatly, but one that he had to accede to; their predicament would not have allowed them to stay anywhere else. They were given one week's grace before their mission was to begin, but in the meantime Jerzey had to reacquaint himself with a community that he had thought that he had left behind him for good.

Within that grand room back in Berlin, the little man in the spectacles, who was in fact the German minister to Danzig Torsten Riedle had made a request of Jerzey, although request was a worthless word. When the party asked something of you, you did it or faced the consequences. The mission they wanted him to undertake had been stressed to him was of great importance to the country and her affairs in the

Free City. Because of his cultural roots, they had decided that Jerzey was the perfect candidate for the role.

His job was to reintegrate himself and his daughter back into the Polish community. He was to explain to everyone that he became involved with how he had moved away some years ago for business reasons and felt that the time was now right to teach his daughter a little culture; this last utterance Riedle spoke through a thin grin. What he told them of Maria's mother was his business. Another thing that was required of him, which was probably the toughest of all the challenges was that he had to appear to all residents, whoever they were, to be patriotically Polish. If this got him into trouble with the authorities then so be it. Riedle gave his word that he would get him released instantly, but he was not to tell anyone the real cause for his actions.

The reason for the whole mission, for the uprooting and secrecy was because they wished Jerzey to work for them, to give them the facts of certain members of the community (his old community) that they felt were a threat to the natural progression of the Nazi way of life. These people included the leaders and members of Polish community organisations, politicians, writers, journalists, and intellectuals. After the speech was over Jerzey was stunned. He was handed a long list of names that the party wished him to observe and this was automatically stored away in his inside coat pocket. He barely remembered having done it. However, now he was here, back in the heart of his old life, he recalled it.

The list was long and it seemed to Jerzey that every member of the community must be on it. Surely there could not be this many Poles still in Danzig. It was split into different sections with each headlined, showing how the people beneath it were involved within the organisation that they had been labelled under. The first name on the list was Dr. Wladyslaw Pniewski.

CHAPTER 4

Wladyslaw Pniewski was as patriotic a Pole as could be found, he had grown up in the former German city of Danzig and was now proud of the fact that the Polish community within that city had gained a foothold, albeit a small one. The struggle was far from over; the aim was to reintegrate Gdansk, as the Poles now openly and proudly called it, back into the newly re-founded Poland. To do this Wladyslaw knew that he and men of his kind had an important role to play. He worked tirelessly, setting up the *Gdansk Society of Friends of Science and Art*. As well as this he also founded and was the director of The Polish Public Library. His primary occupation though was teaching. He instructed young Polish men at the Grammar School and in his time there under the leadership of the great Jan Augustynski, the population of the school had risen from below one hundred students to more than five hundred. He felt proud of this, proud that the Poles of Gdansk were finally being given the opportunity to learn the history of their once great nation; he was also a little proud of the role that he played in increasing the school's profile and standing within the city. Despite all of this, what he was most proud of was a young student of his, Miroslaw Zielinski.

Pniewski had first encountered Miroslaw as a boy. He would barely have noticed him if it was not for his work. He was the quietest, most unassuming pupil that Pniewski believed he had ever encountered. He would sit in the middle of the room, next to the wall and if not directly questioned, you could sometimes quite forget that he was there. This was Miroslaw in class, but there was another Miroslaw, the Miroslaw who wrote. Pniewski had never encountered work of such a high calibre in any student, let alone in a lad of his age. Both the prose and poetry that poured from the mind of this young man possessed the ability to make the simplest aspects of life appear beautiful. He was by far the most gifted writer in the school; Pniewski

would go as far as saying in the region. He could liken him only to Czeslaw Miolsz, the great poet of the Stefan Batory University. He felt that in Miroslaw he had a pupil, who if he could get him into the university in Gdansk, could rival the great the bard of the Batory Establishment.

It had been a tough job getting a place for Miroslaw, the fees were high and although there was help available for Polish students, money was scarce, as the political climate worsened. He had sent off letters and samples of Miroslaw's work, convinced that this would be enough to get him the support that he required, but to no avail. With time running out before the next enrolment, Pniewski decided that there was no other option but to put the money up himself. It was a risk, he realised that, but he saw it as a risk worth taking, this young man would be a credit to him and Pniewski thought that one day he would be a credit to his country as well. There was no way that he would tell Miroslaw about this, he did not want to crash the dream vehicle that the kid was currently riding; if he thought that others had faith in him as well then Pniewski was convinced that he would succeed.

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Günter Freund had realised that getting Miroslaw out of prison was not going to be easy as the Nazis rarely backed down once a decision had been made. They were tireless in their persecution of the Poles and Günter knew it would take a big gesture on his part to help set Marek's brother free. The one thing to his advantage was his position; as manager of the Danzig dockyards he made a lot of money for the administration (much to his dismay) and the one thing that the Nazis did respect was money; so this was the tool that he must use.

Dr. Crusen was the chief justice of the free city; sent to Danzig from Berlin and in Freund's opinion not a man to cross. He sat out his days in his oversized,

overly decorated office, casting down the Nazi rhetoric to the serfs of the city. Günter had little time for the man, but knew that where politics were concerned, sometimes a smile must be used in order to hide bared teeth. Crusen was keen to oblige. In Freund he saw weakness; his love of the Poles, he believed would be his downfall and he knew that by helping him out that he would be weaker still as favours were always returned; the money on offer was also highly attractive. So with his morals around his ankles, Günter paid the bribe and was granted Miroslaw's release.

With his freedom secured, Miroslaw was left to enjoy the remainder of the summer before his tenure at the university was set to begin. His parents had reacted quite differently upon hearing that he had been arrested. Pawel's initial response was one of anger, anger towards the Germans for what he saw as the ongoing persecution of the Poles, but also anger towards Miroslaw for his weakness and naivety at getting caught. Agata was disappointed. As much as she realised that at times the law appeared unfair, she also had great respect for it. For a number of weeks after his arrest she was shunned by the other Polish mothers, usually so jealous of her Miroslaw. All in all the incident had hurt Agata greatly and in her favourite son she was now a little ashamed; but where Miroslaw was concerned she always had a mother's faith that he would once again make her proud and in the years that followed Miroslaw proved her right on more than one occasion.

The summer in question was an eventful one for Miroslaw, not only was he arrested but he had also encountered two of the people that would go on to affect his life in so many ways. He had so much gratitude for Günter Freund and felt as though he was seeing him through renewed eyes. He had encountered years of his father and brother complaining of their German boss and despite reservations about a lot of the comments that fell from their lips, he had inevitably drawn a picture of who this man

must be. Having finally met him, Miroslaw's mental picture was erased and redrawn; rarely in his life had he encountered such kindness and genuine altruism. Having sensibly decided to stay away from the university until it was time for him to officially attend, Miroslaw's free-time was now almost exclusively spent within the Freund household. Herr Freund lived alone with Fritz. Miroslaw did not like to ask what had become of Fritz's mother and with his father at work most of the summer, he got to know Fritz well. The two became solid friends and spent every free minute that they could together; the only other rival for Miroslaw's time was Maria.

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The attempt to get Miroslaw out of prison had not gone to plan. Maria could only watch as the dark green Audi had pulled up, freed her target and driven him away. Jerzey was unhappy; he had need of this Zielinski kid on side, as his research had told him he was as close to Dr. Pniewski as anyone else and so far getting contact with the man himself had proved harder than expected. Pniewski seemed to keep himself locked up within the school, only showing his face when he toddled across to the university buildings or to the Polish library; Jerzey had no idea what the Nazis could want with him, he appeared in all aspects unthreatening. Despite this, orders were orders. He needed to deliver some answers and the best chance he had of getting them was by gaining the trust of Miroslaw Zielinski. Maria would have to try harder.

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Everywhere Miroslaw turned, Maria was there, she would be waiting for him outside his house in the mornings, she would hang around the community centre whilst he made his visits to the members, but most irritatingly she would disturb the precious time that he was spending with Fritz. Miroslaw could not understand; never before in his life had he attracted female company, women and girls to him were like

words and books to his father, the two simply did not co-inhabit. The strangest thing of all was that she appeared to be no ordinary girl, everywhere he went with her he was congratulated by the men of the city that would never have usually noticed him. Complete strangers would either run to shake his hand or would hold his stare long enough to make him increasingly uncomfortable. Marek was incredibly jealous; he simply could not understand why Maria was spending her time pursuing his brother. On one occasion Miroslaw made a rare trip to the Docks to pass on a message to his father. His mother could not bear the place and always sent him when she needed to contact Pawel. Maria was in tow as usual and all of the men including his brother had stood and gawped. One of them, Jan, one of the few of Marek's friends that Miroslaw liked, pulled him aside and with a big grin on his face asked him how a scrawny lad like himself had come to be stepping out with a girl like her. Miroslaw didn't understand the question.

'You know' said Jan, 'how did you do it? What did you say in order to court her?'

Miroslaw blushed; he had not even considered that people were looking at the two of them like that; the thought seemed too ridiculous.

'I'm, I'm not' Miroslaw stammered in return.

'Not what?'

'You know... not w-with her, well not like that anyway, she just sort of follows me around'.

Jan was aghast; there was not a man on the dock who would have passed up the opportunity if a girl like that was interested in them, surely this kid could not be related to Marek.

‘Well my friend’ Jan continued, as he put a friendly arm around Miroslaw’s skinny shoulders ‘If you’re not with her, then maybe you should be’.

After that it just sort of happened, Maria made her feelings more and more obvious and little by little Miroslaw let her in. By the time the university doors opened for the new term they were officially a couple. Miroslaw had no idea what was required of him; he had never considered that it would be a skill that he would need to acquire. Initially she demanded very little, wary of pushing him away, but as the months passed she wanted to know more and more and as he got to know her better Miroslaw began to feel more comfortable in her company and started to open up. He was not sure how he was supposed to feel, the lads in the town would stare at Maria with their mouths open, but he was not convinced that they felt about her as she did. He could appreciate her beauty but had no real desire to do anything about it. He definitely did not love her, but presumed that eventually that would come as it had for his parents.

Being with Maria made Miroslaw feel fantastic, not because of anything that she did, but more for the popularity and sense of status it seemed to have given him. He had never really been that bothered about being popular. People like Marek were, but he had never had any aspirations to be like him. He just presumed that popularity was something that you either had or not and as he did not he was quite happy to live his life without it. Now suddenly everyone wanted to be his friend. Complete strangers, probably friends of his brothers would call hello to him in the street when he walked past with Maria on his arm; his father too was proud finally seeing something that he could relate to in the boy. Even the German guards gave him less hassle, their concentration always on her. He was barely noticed. So initially the

attention had been surprisingly enjoyable; the only problem was that the two people whose affection he craved most were the two who were showing him the least. His mother was worried. As much as she doted on him, she realised that Miroslaw had never attracted the girls in the way that Marek did and was concerned with Maria's sudden infatuation with her son, believing there to be more of the story still to tell where she was concerned.

However the person whose attention Miroslaw most craved was Fritz. The university term was well underway and despite the fact that they still spent most of their time together, something had been missing since Maria's arrival. As the weeks passed the adulation that Miroslaw had briefly been receiving from unknowns passed, as they realised that no matter how nice they were, Maria was never going to leave him for them. Miroslaw knew that he must make more of an effort with Fritz, despite Maria's constant pressure on him to do the opposite. Where Fritz was concerned Miroslaw knew he had someone upon whom he could rely completely. There was no way he was going to let Maria push him away. He realised that if anything, Fritz was more important to him than Maria could ever be. The feelings that he was supposed to have towards her, friendship, trust, love, he felt ten times over for him.

CHAPTER 5

As the winter of '35 swept across Danzig, Jerzey Nowicki could only feel the heat as the pressure from the administration was increased. He had had brief success with some of the names on the list. Already because of his efforts twelve men were currently sitting within Nazi prison cells across the region, but despite the fact that he had worked hard, the bigger catches still eluded him. Maria had been with Miroslaw Zielinski for around six months and whilst she had passed on some useful information as far as Wladyslaw Pniewski was concerned, he still had nothing that he could report to his superiors. Time was running out, the last thing he wanted was to disappoint the party; he must once again up the pressure on his daughter.

Maria did not appreciate the work that she was doing for her father and liked it even less when he demanded more from her. As far as she was concerned she had already done more than should have been required of her. She had been with Miroslaw for longer than necessary and was starting to get tired of it. In Danzig, as it had been back in Dresden, there had been no shortage of male attention, if anything here it was greater, maybe they were a little starved of pretty girls out east, where nice clothes and make-up were limited. The difference now was that she could do nothing about it as she had promised her father that she would not give Miroslaw any reason to doubt her. Initially there had been some male interest which had been taken up when they had first arrived in the city. Miroslaw's brother Marek had been the first and she had liked him straight away. Now, however, there was nothing. She had to spend all her time with that skinny, red-headed twit and it was pushing her to madness.

Miroslaw was not interested in her, this she had realised instantly, always being a girl that knew when a man was looking. There had been no vibes from him. In

a way this made it easier. The thought of them being intimate caused her to shudder. At least she would not have to contend with that. However she felt she had no option but to get on with the job, her father had made it clear what could happen to them if she failed to deliver. The main problem she was encountering was getting close enough to Miroslaw to ask questions. Every weekday he would spend most of his time at the university. As far as Maria was concerned this was fine as that was where he would see Pniewski. The tricky thing was getting him away from the German kid Fritz. He was proving to be a real problem for Maria, not only had he broken Miroslaw out of prison and ruined her plan, he now took up all of his time as well. On the few occasions Maria did get to spend with Miroslaw she would fight a case against Fritz, trying to turn his head against his friend. Nothing seemed to work. Miroslaw was devoted and would not hear a bad word said against him; she realised that despite all her reservations she would have to get closer to Miroslaw than Fritz could ever get, unfortunately for her there was only one way she could do that.

She knew that it was her only option, as the days passed she saw less and less of Miroslaw and her father was getting jumpy. Every knock on the cottage door was like a rap upon his nerves. He became afraid to walk through the town for fear of the wrong person seeing them and asking of his progress; so when Maria came to him with her plan to get closer to Miroslaw Zielinski he was immediately receptive to the idea, despite it being against everything that he would usually want for his daughter. Over the next few weeks father and daughter schemed together, they now thought of little else. Eventually the time for talking was over, the plan needed to be put into operation. They had thought it over so much that it seemed real like something that had already taken place and worked; there was no way it could fail..

CHAPTER 6

Günter Freund was pleased with Fritz; he was getting along well at the university, already bypassing most of his peers and progressing through the levels of his course. He was specialising in ship-building, a subject that was close to Günter's heart, if not his brain and the proud father knew that one-day he would be succeeded by a greater man than he could ever be. Günter had little education where the physical side of the ships was concerned, preferring to leave the technology to the men who knew what they were talking about, mainly the Poles who seemed to be born with a natural knowledge for such things, but where he struggled, Fritz excelled. The kid was brilliant and would very often explain to his father everything that could be known about the mechanics of his ships, from the workings of the engine room to flight of the sails. Günter was fascinated by him; his boy had grown up so much in the last few years and was now barely recognisable from the cowering child that lost his mother at such a young age.

Günter had been just a little older than Fritz when he had first encountered the woman with whom he would one-day share a son. Jaroslava was ten years his senior and as was the way with most Poles of that period, knew next to nothing of her historical past, made to feel as German as was possible by the authorities despite being rejected by them on all levels. Her husband Tomasz was away fighting in a war against the nations that he hoped would eventually secure the release of his home city. Her father was forced to labour on the dockyard despite his age, working on the warships that would help the German cause against Poland and her allies. Günter also worked on the ships despite his personal reservations about a war that he believed his country should never have provoked. The troubles were a year old and rationing was in place throughout the region, so that even the wealthier people of the area, such as

Günter's family were living in the sort of poverty that they had only previously seen the Poles put up with. That said the Poles were still much worse off, as the majority of their men were sent off to fight and those left behind were taken from their usual jobs and placed in the newly formed arms factories or on the docks.

Jaroslava would visit her father everyday bringing him what food she could gather in the town; although it was more her company that the old man craved; times were hard and she was his glinting diamond amongst the rough stones of the yard. Günter worked with her father, Stanislaw and despite his nationality had earned the trust of the old man. As the years of the war passed and the situation of the Poles in the city decreased, Günter would help Stanislaw and his family out with what he could spare. Three years in and Jaroslava got the tragic news that Tomasz had been killed fighting the British in Belgium. The girl was devastated and it was as much as Günter could do to console her and her father, who seemed to be taking it almost as badly as she was. From then on times only got harder. Tomasz's death sat heavy in the air and sent Stanislaw into a world of depression, leaving him with barely enough energy left to work with. His lack of supposed effort did not go unnoticed by his superiors at the docks and he was struck off, leaving himself and his daughter virtually desolate. Jaroslava tried to get work herself, but was shunned by every corner of the city, even her own community turned her away, fearful of giving too much in case of a return to the bad days of the beginning of the war.

Stanislaw's decline was too much to bear for Günter who, despite his young years, had developed a certain sensitivity where others were concerned. He explained the situation to his mother, who was herself struggling with a husband away at war. She was as kind-hearted as her son and took them in immediately. They were not to know it at the time, but the war had little over a year left to play out. Had they realised

how long remained, they may have fought harder against the conscription papers that arrived soon after for Günter; he was to leave immediately.

Günter's departure was a blow to all of them, but Jaroslava took it worst of all, having begun to feel something more for Günter in recent weeks. Initially he had not even been considered as her mind was mixed up in the emotions that she was sharing between grief for her dead husband and sadness for her sick father. As the weeks passed her feelings changed. Günter had done all he could for them and despite the number of years between the two. Jaroslava started to feel more for him than friendship; initially she felt guilty for these feelings and kept them locked up within her. But now, with Günter away the pain of his loss was almost equal to the feelings that had been encountered when Tomasz first left. An old Polish proverb states *if you love him, don't lend him*, Jaroslava had already lent too much to the war and was not prepared to lose anything else. She poured out her feelings to Günter's mother who was delighted and upon his return from Germany's demise, wedding preparations were made. The service was entirely Polish and coincided with the celebrations on the streets from the previously hidden Poles of the city who believed that after so many years Pomerania was to be returned home.

As history now tells us, that fine land was not returned to Poland but rather shared between her former and latter hosts. A new Free City was created giving rights to both the Germans and the Poles; the German population was too high for it to be incorporated into the renaissance happening in Poland. This expected utopian union between two former enemies did not, as the League of Nations had expected, work out as planned, as the majority of Germans in the area fell slowly into their old ways pushing the Poles back into the worker positions that they had occupied for the last century and a half.

Within a month Jaroslava was pregnant, they decided to give their baby a German name despite both of their feelings towards some of the natives of Günter's home-nation. The treatment of the Poles had been worsening and they both felt that by giving their child a Germanic forename he would be less likely to be victimised in the future. Fritz was brought up in the German area of the city and attended a German school, his only official link to his heritage was the middle name that he bore; Stanislaw, a tribute to a grandfather that had died shortly before the end of the war.

The following fifteen years brought happiness and prosperity to the Freund household, as Günter progressed through the ranks at the docks, taking over the management of the famous old yard in the summer of 1928. Fritz too was growing into a fine young man, extremely tall with the blond hair of his father complementing the olive skin of his mother's family; he was doing well at school and held a keen interest in his father's business and his mother's roots. Jaroslava was also happy, she had initially been wary of leaving the Polish quarter and moving in with the Germans; unsure of how they would react to her, but in general she had very little trouble. They had tried to have more children but for more than one reason had been unable. It hardly seemed to matter. Fritz was a blessing and they couldn't have been more content; in 1933 all that changed.

Everyone in Gdansk had been aware of the Nazi Party for a few years. Radio reports from across the border told of a wave of movement in the politics of Germany. Many different stories were broadcast about them, mostly positive. There was talk that they were planning to reclaim the former lands of the Reich, places such as the Free City. This information caused great excitement amongst the Germans. Günter was not so excited; he understood the inert nature of the German psyche and knew that potentially, given too much power, personalities could be corrupted and the need

for greed increased. Here he had history to back up his theory; some would say going as far back as the Napoleonic Wars if not further. The '33 elections saw the Nazis take majority control, things rapidly began to change. The first thing that Günter noticed was the flags. Suddenly they were everywhere, dark red banners, with the shadow of the party cast upon them. From behind the flags emerged the guards; thick black boots supported impenetrable knee-length coats. The swastika tightly wrapped around the left arm, helmets shielding nondescript faces. These were the most fearsome set of men Günter had ever experienced.

As he feared, the people also changed. The new administration brought with it a new confidence. The German arrogance, repressed since the end of the war, had returned. Once again heads were raised, flags saluted and Poles repressed. This repression was instantaneous. For fifteen years the old difficulties between the two cultures appeared to be left in the past; all this changed as the volcano of German patriotism erupted onto the Polish community.

Everyone in the area knew Jaroslava and in general she was well liked. There was very little not to like about her. She and her husband were kind, caring people and their son was a credit to them. Günter was a little worried as attitudes changed that because of their Polish background, his wife and son would come in for some unwanted attention, however he was confident enough in his friends and neighbours that it would not come from their direction. Initially, despite the persecution of the native Poles, they were generally left alone. The odd comment from a guard in the town, but apart from that very little. Then the letters started.

The first one was anonymous:

To the Polish bitch who thinks she's German

You may have the others on side, but you don't fool us. You don't belong here. How dare you think that you can live with the great German people? Go home now or face the consequences. We're watching!

Heil Hitler

If Jaroslava was scared she hardly showed it, just calmly handed over the letter to her husband whispering 'barbarians' under her breath. That was it. Afterwards she refused to speak on the matter. It was Günter who the letter truly spooked. Every visitor to the family home was thoroughly scrutinised, every friend was greeted with a mistrusting smile and every letter was prized open with trembling hands. Nothing further occurred for two months and Günter began to relax, putting the letter down as an action-less prank. Then the second one came. Once again it arrived with no name attached, but this time it came in the mail, sorted at the Post Office, Danzig is German stamped across it.

You haven't left yet! Did you think we'd gone away? You have one week to go back or your Polish friends will start to die! Sleep well Polish whore

Heil Hitler

Günter was petrified and despite not wanting to put his wife through any more grief, realised that he had to show her the letter and then get out of his homeland. The wall that Jaroslava had erected about herself was hard to penetrate. She simply glanced at the letter before letting it drop to the floor. Günter pleaded with her. They had to go.

'This is my home' she responded quietly, 'How can I leave my home? Where would I go?' Günter fell to his knees.

'We could go anywhere; we could go to Poland, maybe to Russia'

'Who do I know in Poland, or Russia? I have never been to these places; this is where I belong, where my family has always been. This is where I will stay, nothing will happen... don't worry, Günter, I will be fine'. There was nothing he

could do. Jaroslava was adamant and for that he was proud of her, but he could not help being fearful also.

A week passed, a week in which every noise had tested Günter's nerves as only the sound of shells in Ypres had ever tested them before. So far nothing had happened; Günter quizzed the Polish lads on the dock for news but none had heard of any events out of the ordinary. Weeks became months and still nothing, but despite this Günter could not relax. He was pleased that Jaroslava had let down her guard a little, becoming the person that she had been prior to the letters. He tried to believe that it was all a hoax, just vicious minds making trouble, but the fear that sat tightly in his heart could not be untangled so easily. Then it happened.

The year was nearly at a close. Günter was pleased to see it pass, he felt that in the last twelve months he had aged at least ten years. Arriving at work as usual, he found himself thinking forward to the festive period, more for the time that he could spend relaxing with Jaroslava and Fritz rather than the holidays themselves. He opened the office door and as usual was the first one in. His assistant, Aleksander Komorowski was always late. Günter did not mind, he liked the early mornings and the time that he got to spend alone was the only opportunity that he had to think with a clear head all day. Also Aleksander was a good friend who he enjoyed working with. He would let him off a few minutes each day, like all the Poles he had had a hard time of late and the last thing he needed was Günter barking at him.

The morning was a sunny one, despite the time of year. Sitting in his cosy office he knew that it was creating a false impression. Outside the air was biting; despite this he had to do his rounds. Günter did not mind this job too much even in the cold he was happy to be on the dock, away from his problems. The walk around the site that he had managed for the last five years was so familiar to him, he ticked each

section off his sheet barely looking at what he was recording. As he walked past the cranes that loomed over he thought of the warships that they had been used during the war and contrasted this with the good that he believed they were doing now. The ships too, were vast; so many of them came through the dock each as magnificent as the last. The masts that seemed go on for ever were the most impressive part of them. Günter could look up at them for hours, conjuring in his mind's eye what must have been seen from those lofty perches. Lost in his maritime imaginations, Günter initially missed the figure at the top of the mast, he also did not notice the unnatural swing of its lifeless body and he most definitely did not spot the sign that had been posted around the neck of the unfortunate fellow. This was not discovered at all until the police, who had struggled to release and then bring down the dead body of Aleksander Komorowski, un-looped it from his neck and handed it to Günter with a quizzical look in their eyes. *Leave now, this is your final warning, next time it will be your wife: Heil Hitler.*

This was serious; Günter was torn between fear for his wife and remorse for his friend. The police had been unsympathetic; they seemed more concerned with the time and effort it had taken them to get Aleksander down. Polish murders were starting to become more and more common and the Nazi employed police were generally inclined to turn their backs to the evil that was being inflicted upon that poor race. Günter determined to leave the dock, leave his once comfortable life and the city that had brought so much joy to him, and go... anywhere. It barely mattered, he just knew that he had to get his family away.

Having dealt with the tragedy as best he could, Günter rushed home and upon entering the family cottage, knew that something was amiss. The door, which appeared closed, was in fact just pulled to. It had been forced; the house was eerily

silent. Usually upon arriving home, Günter was met with his wife's singing; he could not hear an old Polish folk song without dreaming her up in his imagination. Today there was nothing; even the clocks appeared still. As he made his way through the seemingly deserted house, Günter's heart was motoring. He called out to Jaroslava despite knowing deep within himself that she was not there. The kitchen was still; normally such a busy room, the old stove, so often the purveyor of glorious smells was cold to the touch. On top of it was another note; the hairs on his arms stood to attention, he had begun to fear any form of written communication, these handwritten messages had so often been the bearers of bad news. He barely dared to read it. Instantly the handwriting was recognisable and his knees gave way. From his collapsed position, Günter feared the worst. The relief upon reading it, he could not have imagined just seconds before:

Günter Freund: The Lover of the Poles

I understand that you received my message; your friend served me very well as a notice board. I was going to give you a few more days grace, but the look on your face when they pulled that Polish shit down was pure magic, and I couldn't wait to see it again. But alas this time you have been lucky, your bitch of a wife was not here. Don't fear though I will be back, there is no escape, leave now or you will be sorry.

Heil Hitler

The tears that had been pouring from his eyes were now wiped away and replaced with sobs of relief. She had not been here... she *had not* been here; he did not care where she had been or where she was, as long as she was not with this man. Günter made his way upstairs, the place had been ransacked. Clothes were everywhere but his wife was nowhere to be seen. It seemed that whoever had been in his house had looked everywhere for some clue as to where she could be; the thought chilled his heart. There was only one place that he thought that they may have overlooked.

Before Günter was summoned for war he had bought Maria a small jewellery box, only just large enough to contain a pair or two of earrings, but as far as Maria

was concerned it was the most precious item that she owned and she would gaze at it for hours on end thinking of him; in fact it was through staring at the box that she had made the decision to return Günter's affections, realising that Tomasz would have wanted her to be happy. The box, in Maria's opinion, had been the catalyst for their relationship and because of this she kept it in the safest place that she knew of; even Fritz was unaware of its existence. Only Günter was allowed to know where it was stored. Here he looked and here his heart nearly stopped; he prised up the floorboard pulled back the phoney flooring underneath and found the box. Jaroslava rarely left the house without it. His trembling fingers flipped the catch and under the much loved jewellery was another note. This was not the rough-handed sort of letter that he was used to. This was neatly folded and lightly scented; Günter recognised the smell first and then the handwriting after it.

To my dearest Günter

I have gone, please do not come searching for me as by the time you read this there will be no point. I will no longer be of this Earth. I love you my caring husband more than I ever thought I could love someone. You have made my once unworthy life worth living. Thank-you for this and thank-you for our son; take care of Fritz, raise him to be a good man like his father and grandfather before him.

Günter, I am sorry that it had to come to this, but I couldn't let them win, I couldn't let them drive me from my home. Don't worry about me. I will be at rest. My father and Tomasz will care for me until one-day you and I are re-united.

I love you

Jaroslava

Günter was stunned; every muscle within him seemed to break down involuntarily until the only power he had was in his right hand where he gripped the now crumpled letter. Jaroslava was gone, he was certain of that. Not just gone in the sense that she had run away, but gone for ever, gone from him, gone from this life.

As the weeks and months passed, the pain and anger that Günter felt towards Jaroslava slowly faded and was replaced with a feeling of pride in his beautiful wife for escaping the victimisation that she was putting up with and would have had to put up with for the foreseeable future. Günter had initially just felt guilt, at himself for not protecting his wife better and now for his feelings towards her. He could not help it, from the moment he had got the message that she had been pulled from the Bay, all he felt was anger, as far as he was concerned (certainly at that moment) she had left them and taken the easy way out. Günter hated himself for these feelings, but they were uncontrollable and it was only a freak discovery that brought home to him how hard it must have been for her, and how much she had kept from himself and Fritz. Whilst checking through the mess of clothes that had been strewn across the bedroom floor, he came across a photograph. It was fairly grainy but the image was clear enough, it was of Jaroslava, she was walking by the docks probably on her return from having seen him. Under it were the words *we're watching*. At first Günter did not know what to make of this, but as he rummaged deeper into the discarded pile, he found more and more of the mysterious photographs, each of his wife and each with the same message. Günter knew Jaroslava was strong and would have attempted to brush these threats off. She was rarely a woman that was blown off course even in circumstances such as this; it was only upon finding the final image that he realised why she would have felt compelled to do what she did. The picture was of Fritz, he was making his way to the library, as he did on most days. He looked happy and the freshness of youth clearly shone from him. He was also blissfully unaware of the gun that was pointed at his back and its owner who was staring directly at the camera. This time there was no message, there did not need to be; Jaroslava had hidden it away at the

bottom of her clothes and then jumped to her death. Günter understood and instantly forgave his beautiful wife and prayed for forgiveness.

Fritz took his mother's death hardest of all. Where Günter's feelings were of anger towards his wife's perpetrators, Fritz's emotions seemed to be trapped within. He had always been a quiet boy, who rarely told anyone, even his parents how he was really feeling, but since the incident he had completely clammed up. Günter realised that his preoccupation with finding the man in the picture, had left him little time to talk with his son. Even when he did not attempt to connect with him, he was just left frustrated as the boy lost himself in his studies refusing point blank to speak of Jaroslava.

The search for Jaroslava's tormentors was proving futile. As Günter had expected, the authorities had put it down to suicide. In their eyes it was an easy case and with so many other problems to deal with, they were glad to be rid of the paperwork that would have come had this result been anything remotely suspicious. As far as they were concerned Günter was proving annoying, he kept coming to them with photographs of apparent would be assailants, but a few choice words had soon put him off. He valued his work at the dockyard far too highly to risk having it taken from him.

With threats from men far more powerful than himself laid upon him, Günter was forced to end his pursuit. Once this decision was made, all he was left with apart from his son was time; time to think and time to grieve. Since the incident his mind had been chaotic, all he could concentrate on was, firstly catching the monster from the photograph and secondly what he would do to him once caught. This was not him, was not how he had always solved his problems. He realised that if he continued his obsession with these men (as he was sure that it was more than just one), then he was

letting them win all over again, letting them in his head to control his thoughts. The whole incident had nearly destroyed him, but here he was, at his lowest point and still standing. Jaroslava used to say to him, 'what hurts most, teaches soonest' and make no mistake this had hurt, but now was time to recover, now was the time to move on. He would always love his wife, he knew that. There was no way that he could ever forget her, but he realised that he had a responsibility to his son and to himself; within a week he was back at work.

Time has a habit of speeding past us before we realise that it was even there. What are considered to be days and weeks can quite often, in reality be months and years; this is how it now seemed to Günter. Since making the decision to go back to the Dockyard, the world around him seemed to have sped up. He had focused on nothing but his work, attempting to block out all that had happened. He felt as though he was only now just catching up. Fritz, who he was initially worried about, had eventually coped well, better than he had if he was honest and thrown himself into his schoolwork. He was doing so well that he had earned a place at the university, to study ship-building, where he was now six months into his course. He had also made good friends with Miroslaw Zielinski the kid that Günter had helped to get out of jail; finally after all the problems, his son seemed happy again and Günter couldn't have been more proud of him. As he focused on the position that he now found himself in, he reflected that after all that had gone on, he had done well. After a slow start the Dockyard that had gone to ruin in his absence was once again prospering.

CHAPTER 7

Maria could not quite believe that she was going to go through with it; when she had first had the idea, she did not think that her father would ever accept it, would put his cherished daughter through such a thing. She had only put forward the suggestion to show that she was (at least in his eyes) doing everything she could to help them out of their situation.

It had been two years since the incident at the university when she had first made contact with Miroslaw and since that time she had been living a lie, pretending that she saw only him. Of all the men in Pomerania there was not one to touch him, that she loved him. It had not been too bad, she could cope with lying to him, telling someone that she loved them meant nothing to Maria, it was just words, with as much meaning as any other. Luckily this was as far as it had got. Miroslaw was different to most, if not all the men that Maria had previously lent her affections; he was quite happy just to sit and talk, to walk around the town of an evening or enjoy the silence of St Mary's Cathedral. There was never a request for anything more and for this Maria was relieved. But this was different, her father was talking of marriage, and because she had initially suggested the idea there was nothing that she could do to put him off.

The last thing that Jerzey wanted was for his daughter to be unhappy, but with the pressure from above to reveal more and more information about the key names on the list he had little other option. Miroslaw had so far told Maria virtually nothing of the "great" doctor and the only way that Stanislaw saw that she could get the information was to get it herself. Her only access was to become the wife of the man's most trusted protégé, Miroslaw Zielinski. The wedding would be annulled instantly; Jerzey had many contacts within the administration. No sooner had the ink dried on

the page than it would be officially removed and discarded by German forces in positions higher than Jerzey could ever hope to attain. Mirosław, of course, would know nothing of this.

If Mirosław was ever going to propose marriage, Maria knew that he would take some persuading, it had taken enough just to get the relationship started in the first place. The only other man except Pniewski that he would listen to was Fritz, despite everything she had said about him, he was going to have to approve their union and then suggest it to his less than forthcoming friend.

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