



Chapter 2 Germany

It was a hot summer afternoon when Herr Best and family approached his brother's city of Wiesbaden. The journey had been tedious, with delays for ship passage and train passage and assorted clearances and briefings, and Ernst was thoroughly tired of traveling. Now he admired the scenery with increasing nostalgia as the train drew closer to the familiar area. This was the Rhineland, perhaps the most beautiful region of Germany. The rivers wound through the hills and mountains, girt by lovely old castles, the remnants of medieval greatness. These were among the few things that were not tidy, orderly, and cleaned up in Germany, but it would have been a shame to modernize the ruins which had endured for centuries. The area was thickly wooded, with vegetation threatening to overrun the edifices; Ernst's mind's eye filled in what he could not see from the tracks. Yes, Germany remained in certain enchanting respects primal; no one would take it for a modern industrial nation, from this vantage.

Then the suburban outskirts of Wiesbaden appeared, dominated by agriculture, fruit plantations, vineyards and mansions. A hundred and seventy thousand people lived here--a small number compared to the half million of Frankfurt, nearby. But Wiesbaden was still far from village status.

This had been home for Ernst during the first years of his life. Then his father had gotten the good position that took the family all around the world, and Ernst had been here only irregularly. His Uncle Karl had taken over the estate, though he was only a shopkeeper. Theoretically he maintained it for his brother; in practice it seemed to have become Karl's. But if Herr Best--to Ernst, his father would always be Herr Best, *the* important figure of the family--if he remained in Germany this time, that would change. Ernst hoped that would be the case. He was tired of getting uprooted.

Uncle Karl met them at the station and chauffeured them to the estate in the big 1936 convertible Mercedes Limousine. New cars, Ernst realized, were hard to come by these days; too much of the country's industrial capacity was going to war machines. In fact the possession of a new car might almost be considered unpatriotic, since the materials and effort squandered in its manufacture might better have been contributed to the nation's effort of improvement. But Herr Best was not an ordinary citizen, and this car would last for decades; it had been built with German pride.

"This time you must stay," Uncle Karl said genially to Herr Best. "It is no longer safe in foreign lands."

"But there is money to be made there, and there are services to be rendered there, for the good of the Fatherland," Herr Best replied with the cheerful resignation of his nature. They were speaking in German, of course; it still seemed slightly strange to Ernst, after two solid years of English. Uncle Karl knew English, but normally declined to speak it. However, Ernst knew that German, like a long disused shoe of good quality, would soon become fully natural to him again.

"Money to be made here too!" Uncle Karl exclaimed. "Since Hitler came to power, the economy is booming. My shop caters to the affluent factory workers, and business is good, very good." He turned his face to Ernst. "Do you miss the Hitler Youth, lad? There's an excellent outfit."

"I miss Germany," Ernst said. Which was true--but at the moment, the memory of his friends in America was more poignant. He had been a little afraid to make new friends after the loss of Hans Bremen, especially among flyers. But Lane Dowling, who in certain respects resembled Hans, had not been one to be denied. It was as though such people forged ahead as rapidly in social contacts as they



and in the airplanes they so loved, and the targets of their attention could not be unmoved. He sincerely hoped Lane would not crash also. But Uncle Karl would never understand that sentiment, so it wasn't worth discussing.

Karl went on to other subjects, ensuring that there would be no gap in conversation. Karl was not much for silences, in contrast to Herr Best's more introspective side of the family. Perhaps it was a survival trait for shopkeepers to be loquacious, and for diplomats to be silent. "Have you kept up with current events?" he inquired meaningfully.

"You are referring to Austria?" Herr Best replied.

"Wasn't that something! This man Hitler is a marvel! Remember the terrible, degrading terms forced on Germany after the war? The bruising reparations, the occupation of Frankfurt? Right here, those misbegotten French troops passed, pillaging--"

"That is the nature of armies," Herr Best agreed grimly. "The French occupied the Saar until the end of 1930, as I recall."

"As you recall!" Karl snorted. "As if you weren't cursing the French the whole time, since the Saarland is hardly a stone's throw from here. German territory, stolen by the French!"

"But we do have it back now," Herr Best rejoined mildly. He had a more cosmopolitan outlook, having traveled far more widely and been exposed to many foreign viewpoints. Ernst, remembering the differences in attitudes about the Jews, could understand. What made sense in France or America did not necessarily make sense in Germany--and vice versa.

"And the occupation of the Ruhr," Uncle Karl continued, warming up to a favorite subject. "All because they claim we defaulted on reparations payments. How could Germany repay such huge amounts when she had six million workers out of work, with their families hungry--and that meant twenty-five million living *people* hungry--and no freedom, no equality, no territory because the French had annexed it all? The Versailles treaty was a monster; they promised us Wilson's Fourteen Points, but they betrayed us--and then they violated even that poor document! They had no honor at all!"

"True," Herr Best agreed, remembering. "Victors need no honor." He had not spoken openly of this at home, but Ernst had picked it up. Germany had been foully treated and could no longer trust the promises of enemies. Especially those who were not Aryans. What was honor to lesser races? Better to fight to the last man! Better still to make sure that Germany never lost another war.

"Those cursed payments had already destroyed the Reichsmark," Kurt continued. "The damned bloodsuckers destroyed our currency, then invaded our territory because our currency was no good!"

"Please," Ernst's mother murmured, reminding Ernst uncomfortably of the way the Quaker girl cautioned his friend Lane. Indeed, Uncle Karl's neck had grown red and his voice tight, as it did when he suffered an overload of emotion. Yet this was a righteous ire shared by many, perhaps the majority of Germans. In America, Ernst knew, people were hardly conscious of the ravages that depression and the Reparations brought to Germany. Like a starving, whipped cur, his country would have turned against its tormentors at last--but there had been no way, for Germany had also been disarmed. The Americans had never experienced this degree of humiliation, so regarded it lightly. They had suffered only a gentle backwash of the world Depression, rather than its frontal savagery. But at least America had not been closely involved in this, so the anger of the Fatherland was not directed there. France was the major



ulprit, and to a lesser extent England.

Uncle Karl calmed himself, turning to a more positive subject. "But Adolf Hitler changed all that. He stabilized the currency, reduced unemployment, brought law and order and restored pride to us. He made the *Volk* respectable again. He made the French return the Saarland. He rearmed us, and there was nothing the French or the British could do. He made Austria part of Germany, as it should have been long ago. Austria wanted to unite with us, but the Allies prevented it from pure spite. They wanted us to suffer! And now, soon, Czechoslovakia--"

"Czechoslovakia?" Herr Best inquired, as if he didn't catch the drift. Ernst smiled privately; his father kept a low profile, politically, but he knew precisely what was going on. He had probably known about the Czech situation long before it had come to Uncle Karl's attention.

"There are millions of good Germans settled in the Czech Sudeten," Karl assured him. "They are mistreated there, under foreign rule. There have been riots. They must be permitted to rejoin the Fatherland, and Germany itself must have *Lebensraum*, room to live. It is only right."

And there was a potent term, Ernst thought. *Lebensraum* was part of Hitler's *Blut und Boden* vocabulary: blood and soil. It suggested that the members of fittest race had to establish a link of blood to the soil they worked, and extend their territory to the regions governed by weaker races in order to gain more soil for the superior blood. The strong needed room to live.

"Indeed so," Herr Best agreed. But he was understandably sober. "We do not operate in a political vacuum, internationally. If such unification should provoke war--"

"Then it will be a righteous war! Besides, Germany is strong, now. No more will the French intrude on our soil with impunity."

Ernst was listening, but his eye was wandering over the familiar yet newly strange scenery beyond the road. He noted the new buildings and reduced vegetation. He had traveled through here when in the Hitler Youth.

"And what is your opinion, Ernst?" Karl inquired suddenly.

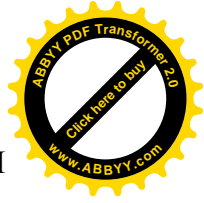
"I prefer not to express opinions on matters which are beyond my competence," Ernst said carefully.

"Then express one on a matter within your competence," his uncle said. "Demonstrate the manner your mind is maturing." It was a challenge. Karl had never said so directly, but had always managed to convey the impression that Herr Best was a relative nonentity, and his son another.

Ernst glanced at his father, who looked away. It was time for Ernst to perform for his fiery uncle, and take the consequences. If his sojourn in America had corrupted him, Karl would make him pay.

He remembered the game of Truth he had played with his American friend Lane and Lane's Quaker fiancée. This was like another episode of that. He could make of it what he chose.

"This region reminds me of my experience in the Hitler Youth," he said. "I traveled this road then. I joined at age fifteen, when the program was rapidly expanding, and I enjoyed it and believe I did well. Today boys may join at ten, serving four years in the *Jungvolk*, the junior division, then four more in the



senior division, *Hitler Jugend*, which we called HJ. I was too early, so lacked those first four years; I simply crossed over from one of the other youth programs."

"Which makes you exactly like every other boy in Germany," Karl said. The implication was that Ernst had no mind of his own. But to deny it would be a trap. How could he differ from the patriotic support of his country?

Seeing the trap was tantamount to avoiding it. But he wanted to do more than that; he wanted to set his uncle back a step, to teach him some respect--without ever expressing any disrespect. There was the true challenge. So he allowed himself to walk further into the trap, seemingly.

"Perhaps so," he agreed. "There was no social pressure put on me to join; I simply liked the uniform and the programs and the camaraderie and the approval of my family. My father, working in the government, was a Nazi Party member, and of higher social status than that of the families in my neighborhood, which sometimes made for awkwardness. But in the HJ there were boys from all classes, and there were no social distinctions. In that framework, I could have any friends I wanted, including some my family might otherwise frown upon." He glanced again at his father, who continued to fix his gaze elsewhere. "All of us were united in HJ in patriotism, and excitement. We camped out, we ate well, we marched in parades, we rode horses, paddled inflated rafts across wild rivers--well, flowing streams--rowed boats, motorcycled, climbed mountains, threw dummy hand grenades, flew gliders, and indulged in many sports. We boxed, participating in tournaments, winning prizes, developing ourselves physically. We sang, both patriotically and just for fun. We loved every bit of it."

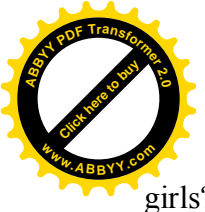
"Completely ordinary," Karl said. "No individual character at all."

"Completely," Ernst agreed. "Except in the approved manner. We had an enhanced sense of responsibility and dedication. For the Hitler Youth in my day was run by youths rather than by adults. Here, boys were no longer subservient to teachers; we were not confined to prisonlike buildings. Boys were supreme! There was an exuberance about that which was almost intoxicating. This was an escape from narrowness, and it was associated with something vital and important. This was the uplifting spirit. Here were--the *Volk*."

"The *Volk*!" Karl echoed, agreeing. He had used the word himself.

"What spirit is associated with that term!" Ernst continued. "It stands for the racially and spiritually pure and fit, the young strength and hope of the nation. In the world War we Germans lost partly because we had been deceived and betrayed by the Allies and Jews and Communists, and partly because we had not been strong. Not strong enough to withstand the kicks of the whole world. But this time our youth is being brought to its full potential, to be absolutely superior to all others. Other nations may let their youth lie fallow, to grow up into weaklings. I have seen it in America: few are strong. One in a hundred, a thousand." He thought of Lane Dowling, indeed one in a thousand. "Most Americans never approach their potential, lacking any program to bring them up to it. But here in Germany we know that a physically healthy human being with courage is more valuable than any weakling, regardless how intelligent that weakling may think himself. The *Volk* are strong, and I am proud to be one of them."

Karl eyed him appraisingly. He could not argue with this thesis without seeming false to the Fatherland, and he could not object to Ernst's attitude on the grounds of conformity. Ernst was conforming in the most patriotic possible manner. Herr Best was still gazing away, but smiling. He knew that Ernst had backed Karl off. That was a significant family event.



Then Karl changed the subject, which was his way of conceding the issue. "And what of the girls?"

"I did not go to America to socialize, I went to learn the best of what they had to offer." But now he thought of Lane's fiancée, Quality Smith. On the surface a typically decadent college creature. But she was not. She was another in a thousand, intriguing in surprising ways.

"Wait until you see the *Mädchen*," Karl said smugly. "Remember that spindly neighbor's girl Krista?"

Krista. Ernst concentrated, remembering. She had been fourteen, perhaps fifteen, in the BDM, *Bund Deutscher Mädchen*, the League of German Girls within the Hitler Youth. He had seen a lot of her because her house was adjacent and her main entertainment had been to tag along after him. Her family had not kept close enough watch on her. She had stringy yellow hair, freckles, a turned-up nose and awkward limbs.

But Krista, despite her inadequacies, had believed in the Aryan ideal. She had been convinced that proper living and proper effort would transform her, too, into a superior creature. She had had faith, determination, and precious little else.

"I remember," Ernst said.

Uncle Karl grinned. "You have an experience coming. She is most eager to see you again."

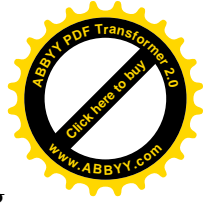
"All in good time," Ernst murmured, aware that he was the object of some sort of joke. Had Krista become an amazon? That was hard to imagine.

At last they drew up to the house. This was a fine big mansion, stone-fronted, surrounded by neatly trimmed lawns and hedges. Ernst had lived here four years, between Herr Best's Spanish and American assignments. Two of those years his father had been away on duty in Japan; the family had felt it better for Ernst to remain in civilized Germany during this important segment of his education. Thus he had had four full years in the Fatherland, and he remained grateful. It was not that he had disliked his time in Spain or America--those had in fact been rewarding years, and he had been sorry to part with his friends in those places--but he had friends here too, and continuity was important.

But now he had no time for reflection. They were swept up in the rush of moving in. Several of the old servants remained, and all had to be individually greeted by each member of the returning family. Ernst more or less turned off his mind and engaged in the necessary ritual.

Ernst had hoped to renew his acquaintance with his friends, particularly his peers of the Hitler Youth, but he was disappointed. Most of them were gone. The fittest had joined the *Wehrmacht*, the army; others had gone into Party service. The rest had found employment in the booming economy. There was virtually no one to talk to. What a change two years had made!

Then Krista showed up, as Uncle Karl had warned she would. Ernst did not at first recognize her. She had been gangling at fifteen; now she was voluptuous at seventeen, with hair that glistened like that of a harvest goddess, and startlingly blue eyes. Her freckles had abated, and her nose had assumed aesthetic proportions, enhancing her facial features. In fact, she was little short of stunning.



They sat in the receiving room, decorously, and talked, for Herr Best tolerated no impropriety between the sexes. In this he was in exact accord with the stricture of the Hitler Youth. Ernst, having seen the way it was in America, now found the German system constrictive. But in due course he would be on his own; then he would see. Here, he obeyed the rules of the house. He watched while the maid delivered innocuous refreshments and retreated.

Ernst had expected conversation to be strained, for he had not really wanted to encounter the girl so soon. But Krista was charged with news and excitement, and she carried the dialogue forward at the pace of a bubbling brook.

"Oh, Ernst, you are as handsome as ever! How was it in America? Have you forgotten how to speak German? How do you like me now?" And she inhaled, turning her profile to advantage. How well she knew what she had become, a strikingly beautiful young woman. Ernst was reminded of Lane, again, who had by his own confession been a weakling in youth, but transformed into a very fine figure of a man. Krista had certainly transformed! Maybe there was more to positive living than Ernst had supposed; more likely Krista had been fated to blossom at this time regardless of her beliefs or actions.

"I miss the Hitler Youth," Ernst said, avoiding her challenge for a compliment. She had become a forward girl, and that was not ideal.

"I'm in the BDM," she said quickly. "I'm a group leader, same as you were. We may demonstrate in Nuremburg next month."

"The Nuremburg rally," he said, remembering. "How well I recall that!"

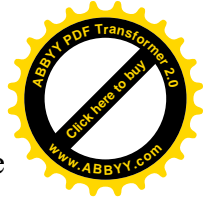
"Yes, you were there," she agreed brightly. "Tell me how it was."

She was playing up to him deliberately, pretending a greater interest than she felt, in order to flatter him. Ernst was aware of this, and was accordingly flattered. His prior image of her was fading under the onslaught of present reality. She was one radiantly attractive girl, and the force of her prettiness was almost tangible. But he was wary of such attention. Why should this newly-bloomed creature be so fascinated with him, after two years separation? He preferred to ascertain her true motive before accepting her interest at face value. So he temporized. "How do you feel about the Youth? I mean, of course everyone attends until age eighteen, but do you really like it?"

"Of course I like it!" she exclaimed defensively.

What else would she say? To criticize the *Führer's* youth program would be unpatriotic. Yet sometimes expressed patriotism could mask a fundamental dissatisfaction with the system. Ernst had always understood that; his father's employment had made him canny about the ways of covert and overt belief. Part of the reason he had succeeded so well with his youth group was his comprehension of the motives of individuals. He had acted quietly to get the incorrigibles and incompetents transferred to other units, and had concentrated on the wavering cases that had most promise. In due course he had brought them to full belief and acceptance, so that they worked wholeheartedly for the benefit of the group. Ernst's troop had become one of the most disciplined and responsive, a model, and the rewards had been gratifying. They had made public demonstrations, and in the end had been selected to march at Nuremburg: an honor that brought lasting pride to every member.

Now he applied his subtle skill to Krista. "I liked it too. But the horses were better than *Mein Kampf*."



"The horses!" she agreed joyfully. Of course a healthy girl liked to ride. But there was also the tacit confession that she had not been interested in the *Führer's* autobiography. The truth was, few youths were. Ernst himself had read it and found it fascinating--but that was because he had special interest. He was the only one he knew who had honestly gotten through it. The other boys, if they read at all, had much preferred the heroic sagas of Karl May, and Krista surely was no exception. Her body had changed remarkably in two years, but her mind had remained more constant. Copies of *Mein Kampf* were abundant--it was perhaps the most widely distributed book in Germany--and they remained clean and neat because they received almost no attention. This girl was probably a minimal reader; she read only what she had to, to set an example and qualify for a position of leadership.

"And the ghost stories were better than the propoganda," he added.

"They still are," she agreed. Then she picked up the significance and affected shock. "Propaganda?"

"Do not be naive," he cautioned her. "Propoganda is not a bad word. All countries use it. In America the people are conditioned to believe in the saintliness of Roosevelt and the sanctity of the rights of all citizens, even the negroids and the Jews."

"The Jews!"

"And what is wrong with the Jews?" he asked, smiling.

She was so confused she splattered. "How can you--"

Ernst laughed. "All I am doing is telling you how it is in decadent America. They have almost no concept of racial purity, of *Volk*. They take pride in being a melting pot of races."

"What do they know," she said, relieved. "You shouldn't tease me so."

"Pretty girls are meant to be teased." Actually he had been trying to draw her out, to provoke her, to verify what she was now made of, so that he could come to a conclusion whether she was worthwhile to know. Ernst certainly appreciated the physical appeal, but that was superficial, like the shine on a car. More important were the fundamental attributes of personality and intellect. In addition, he was interested in exploring the currently prevailing attitude on race, for he suspected racism had been intensifying here while he had been exposed to the far more liberal attitudes of the Americans. He could make a fool of himself in Germany if he misjudged the political climate; he preferred to play it safe.

Krista, meanwhile, was blushing, pleased at the compliment. She had worked so hard for such a harvest! But she could not refer to it directly, so she continued the other subject. "So you did not associate with Jews, there?"

"I met some. I was on a college wrestling team, and one of my matches was against a Jew." Actually, a teammate had been Jewish, but Ernst deemed it inexpedient to advertise that here. "I must confess he was a strong man; he looked almost Nordic, and he fought fair. I would not have known his origin, had he not told me."

"And you touched him?"

Ernst laughed again. "It is difficult to win a wrestling match without touching your opponent!"



ews are after all people, even as we are. It can be hard to blame them for the unfortunate accident of their birth. This one's grandfather was a Jew; he himself did not follow their abominable religion." Even here he was skating on thin ice, for he was not at all sure there was anything inherently abominable about the Jewish religious ritual. Was it really so different, fundamentally, from the ceremonies of Roman Catholicism? Obviously the Jews and Catholics thought so, but Ernst himself was disinterested in the various forms of religion. He believed in God, but was uncertain which forms of worship God actually favored.

"A Jew is a Jew, to the sixth generation," she said grimly. Tainted blood was extremely potent; a tiny drop of it could ruin an otherwise excellent Aryan.

"True. Yet in America it is different. Their discrimination is very subtle. Their Jews can intermarry freely with others. Some hold responsible positions; some are honored in politics or industry. To many Americans, what they term racism is a worse offense than being Jewish."

"You must be glad to be home!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, of course--but not for that reason. If I were to live in America all of the time, I would probably come to feel as they do, to accept Jews as part of the society. Jews are people too, after all."

"Are you testing me?" she demanded, growing worried and angry.

He was, but not in the way she thought. He was verifying her horizons, which seemed not to have expanded as adequately as had her body. "Perhaps I am merely verifying my own beliefs," he said carefully. "I did not object to Jews at first. It was only after I read *Mein Kampf* that I realized their nature. How they infiltrate quietly into society, like worms in fresh apples. How they pretend allegiance, but actually conspire to hurt decent folk and dominate the world. Even now I concede that some Jews could be good people. But they are indelibly tainted by their blood and their heritage. A tame python might be a worthwhile pet, but it remains a python, and must pay the penalty of its kind."

"What penalty?" she asked.

"Well, the python caused Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, so that she and Adam were exiled from the Garden of Eden. For that the python is accursed among animals--"

"I meant the Jews," she said.

"The Jews? Maybe they should all emigrate to America. I do not wish them any harm. I merely want my homeland pure. A Jew-free Germany." He shrugged. He was expressing a safe attitude, rather than his own. "But this is no subject for parlor conversation! You were telling me how it is in the Youth."

"As if you didn't know!" She frowned. "You think I can't tell you anything new? I'll show you! Have you heard about Rommel?"

"I know of no Youth by that name."

"Lieutenant-Colonel Rommel, stupid--the war hero. Last year he joined the Hitler Youth."

"The war hero? Holder of the highest decoration, the *Pour le Merite*? Certainly I know of him!



but the war was twenty years ago; isn't he a little old for--"

"As instructor, as advisor!" she said, laughing. "They decided to put in a real soldier, to give some practical military training. He was doing it too, organizing for sound education and character building. But our dear leader Schirach, who is no soldier, got jealous. He wants to run the Youth all by himself. Rommel told him right out that if he wanted to be the leader of a para-military force, he should first become a soldier himself. Oooo, Schirach didn't like that! So he kicked Rommel out. They called it reassignment, of course, to cover up the truth. How's that for news?"

"It's a scandal!" Ernst exclaimed. "A man like Rommel--I wish my troop had had his instruction!"

"So the Youth is not perfect," she said smugly. "There is politics there too. You thought I was too stupid to know, didn't you?"

"Well, a girl as pretty as you doesn't need to be smart." There was an art to temporizing.

Krista struggled with that statement, but finally decided it was a compliment. "Now will you tell me about Nuremburg?"

"Nuremburg is a famous city in the mountain's of southern Germany, in Bavaria, some two hundred and forty kilometers east-southeast of here--"

She hit him lightly with her small fist. "Will you stop that? You know I meant when you went there, four years ago."

"Oh, that. Four years is a long time to remember." Actually he owed it to her; the news she had imparted about Rommel was certainly of interest to him. What a lost opportunity for the Youth! If Ernst had to enlist in the army, he'd jump at the chance to serve under Rommel.

Of course Krista hoped to go to Nuremburg herself, for the annual festivities, and she wanted the reassurance of his prior experience. He should be happy to tell her all about it; seldom would he have a more enthusiastic audience. Yet somehow he found himself holding back. Why?

He figured it out in a moment. It was because a substantial part of Krista's interest had to be in him, rather than in the subject. That was flattering, but it was time to begin distancing himself from her, if he didn't want to be pushed into more of a commitment than he desired. It was obvious that both his family and hers thought that the two of them would be an excellent match, and so they had been put together and left alone. Krista already wanted him, and she was now the kind of girl any man would want. Propinquity was bound to have effect.

But Ernst did not want to be managed. Perhaps he had indeed been corrupted to that extent by his stay in America. He wanted to choose for himself, especially in love. Also, he had become more discriminating. He now recognized in Krista certain limitations, a narrowness of outlook, that subtly repelled him. She was beautiful, but she was not the shadow of the woman that Lane's fiancée Quality was. He did not want to be bound to her.

But how could he avoid it? It seemed that everyone, including Krista herself, was determined to do it. He could not simply decline; there would be repercussions and unpleasantness.

Then he thought of a way. He would answer her, but in a way that should discourage her from



1 pursuing him. If he could cause her to lose her interest in him, not because of any suspicion about his patriotism but for unspecified reason, he would soon be free of her without blame.

He moved closer to her and put his arm around her shoulders. "I will be happy to tell you all about it. The very memory thrills me."

She turned into him, surprised and pleased by his action. He hoped that this was a superficial reaction. "You can imagine the excitement of preparation, the constant drilling, the competition with other units, the hope and fear of success, and of the enormous satisfaction of having your troop chosen to go to the Nuremberg Rally."

"Yes," she breathed.

He moved his hand down from her shoulder to her hip. "As you know, the city is almost three hundred kilometers by road from Wiesbaden, because the road follows the meandering river and the contours of the land, stretching out the distance. It was a longer journey than many of us had made before, which was part of the excitement."

"Yes!"

His hand moved slowly along her thigh. "It was a glorified camping excursion; we sang patriotic songs on the way. But in time boredom set in, for we were sixteen, with brief attention spans. The songs degenerated. Finally we got to the notorious ribald *Es Zittern die morschen Knochen*, 'The rotten bones are trembling,' only certain portions were changed so that it became 'the rotten bones are trembling in the ass.'"

Krista giggled. She gave no sign of objecting to the manner his hand was traveling. But she would have to, soon.

"At that point I was compelled to call off the singing," he continued. "There could have been serious repercussions if anyone in authority had overheard."

"I have heard of that song," Krista said. "I don't know the words, of course."

"Of course," he agreed with a chuckle. He gave her thigh a squeeze through the cloth of her skirt. Still she did not object. Could she be unaware?

"Then we encountered a contingent traveling south from Leipzig, and one of my boys yelled 'Beefsteak!' and almost started a pitched battle between groups. For it is known that in the larger cities a good many Communist youth groups had converted to the Hitler Youth under pressure, and many Communists had joined the Nazi storm troopers. Thus we referred to them derisively as 'beefsteak Nazis': brown on the outside, red on the inside. It takes more than a brown shirt to make a good Nazi."

"Beefsteak!" Krista exclaimed, giggling. "That's good! You should have fought them."

His hand continued past her knee and made the turn. He found the hem of her skirt and touched her bare leg. "But what kind of a marching exhibition would my troop have put on, if it had gotten beaten up beefsteaks?" Ernst inquired. "They outnumbered us, and some were pretty large steaks." But in truth he was rather proud of the episode. He hated Communism.



"True," she said with similar regret.

"The Rally was phenomenal. It lasted almost a week, with different programs scheduled each day. There were so many people there that they filled the streets and courtyards. All day there were marches and parades, with banners and standards, the magnificent black swastika symbol of the *Volk* set in a white circle against a bright red background. There was singing and cheering in unison, a mighty chorus from thousands of throats. Bands played stirring military music; drums beat out the thrumming cadences. Emotion built up. It was terrific."

"Yes," she whispered.

His hand was now sliding back up her leg, taking the skirt with it. Still no protest. Where was her limit?

"Then the *Führer* spoke, thundering out his enthusiasm for Germany, for the great ideals of this great nation, for the thousand year empire of the Third Reich. The crowd responded passionately, and I was one with it. '*Ein Reich! Ein Volk! Ein Führer!*' over and over, louder and louder. The Nation, the People, the Leader--what inspiration! The emotion of the occasion charged the air; it was as if the very soul of the *Volk* issued forth from these massed bodies. Individual response no longer existed; there was only the passion of the moment."

"Oh," she said, her eyes shining. How could she be oblivious to the progress of his hand? He was now passing the knee again, inside her skirt. He had expected her to balk before this, to start drawing away, to be repulsed by the discovery that he was only interested in forbidden touching. That he was, in short, a typical young man. She was supposed to be turned off by this revelation, and to lose her fascination with him.

"At night there was a torchlight procession. The drumbeat grew deafening, compelling every foot, even among those who only watched. I had never experienced a more moving demonstration. The beat and image pulsed in my brain long after the marches passed. I could hardly sleep."

"Yes."

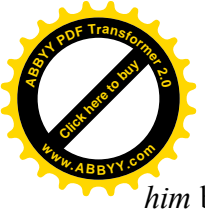
"Then came the Party Day of Unity, and the Youth Rally. This was the biggest moment of all. My troop was one of those privileged few to march in the sight of the *Führer*. And Adolf Hitler spoke directly to the Youth, praising the boys for their past achievements and for their attainment of the important goal of discipline. Only discipline and obedience, he said, would make us fit to issue orders later in life."

"Yes," Krista repeated. Then, as his hand crossed the top of her bared thigh and headed inside: "Someone might see."

She had finally balked! He had been getting worried.

Then she stood, adjusted her skirt, and sat sideways on his lap, her skirt falling down outside. "But now they can't," she murmured, and leaned in to kiss him.

Ernst stiffened his jaw to prevent it from dropping. *She* was not objecting. What was he supposed to do now?



She had to be bluffing. She was too conformist to break with convention. She was trying to make *him* back off. Where would he be, if she succeeded? So it was a contest between them, and he had to win it if he wanted to be free of her.

She was right about one thing: no one could see his hand under her skirt now. The contest would be invisible. Where would she stop? He would find out. He moved in and touched the slick satiny surface of her buttock.

But meanwhile he talked, because it was the sound of their voices that reassured family members elsewhere in the house. Silence would occasion an investigation. "I remember the very words Hitler spoke. 'We want to be a peace-loving people, but at the same time courageous,' he concluded ringingly. 'That is why you must be peaceful and courageous too. Our people must be honor-loving; you must learn the concept of honor from earliest childhood.' For all of us in the audience had learned the consequence of dishonor, as practiced by the Allies after the War. The *Volk* would set a new and perfect standard for all the world to behold and try to emulate. 'You must be proud,' the great man continued. 'Proud to be the youthful members of the greatest nation in the world. But you must also practice obedience. You must learn to overcome hardship and privations. There must be no class distinctions among our people; never let such notions take root among you.' And, with a flourish, he finished: 'All that we expect of the Germany of the future, we expect of you. We shall pass on, but Germany will live in you.'"

"Oh, yes!" Krista agreed. Ernst wasn't sure whether she meant agreement with Hitler's words, or with the progress of his hand, which was now far beyond the bounds of propriety.

He carried on. "The applause interrupted the great man frequently during his speech. Now the cheering was deafening. The Hitler Youth anthem played, and the *Führer* shook hands with the most favored Youths. Among those was mine. I was afraid the very bones of my fingers would shake apart as I shivered with excitement. I remember thinking *The* rotten bones are trembling, and being horribly embarrassed at the very notion. I didn't matter, but I would have hated to soil Hitler's hand with rotten bones. But his grip was firm, and mine seemed so too. 'Fine job!' the *Führer* murmured, giving me a brief, meaningful glance. Then he went on, leaving me half stunned. The great man had spoken personally to me, and looked me right in the eye!"

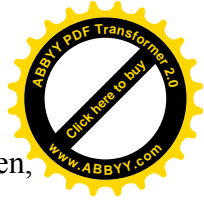
"Oh, that must have been Heaven!" Krista agreed enviously, the muscles of her legs tightening against his hand. "To shake *his* hand!"

It had been, indeed. Yet this present moment had a certain devious similarity, for her body was also having an electrifying effect on his hand. He was beginning to hope that she *wouldn't* balk.

"It was," he agreed. I was half-dazed in off-moments for days thereafter. That was when I read *Mein Kampf* and learned about the Jews." He didn't say that he had since had cause to doubt that all Jews were of that nature.

"More," she said.

Yet again he was surprised. Did she mean more about his life, though the high point of it had passed with that meeting with Hitler, or more of what he was doing under her skirt? Or both? He was about to have to concede defeat, because there was not much farther he could afford to go without hopelessly compromising himself as much as her.



"There is not much, and I think you know it already. I graduated from the Youth at age eighteen, and was ready for my national service. But then my father was transferred to America. That was a separate experience, and one I value."

"And now you are back, and I am so glad to have you back," she said. "As I have been trying to show you."

She had indeed. "Now I am twenty, and am subject to military service," he said. "Later I can complete my education at a University, perhaps at Frankfurt." Actually the Fuhrer despised those who studied as weaklings, unfit for the *Volk*, unless they specialized in something technical or agriculture. While Ernst would never criticize Hitler, he hoped that his own interest in higher education would not be considered too large a blemish on his character. "I will seek a term in the regular army or the SS. Unless my father is able to exert influence and get me into a university immediately. It is not that I am unpatriotic, but that I think I can best serve the Fatherland by completing my education first. So it seems likely that I will not be here at home long."

"Is this a polite riddance?" she asked.

"I thought it might be," he said, taken aback again by her candor.

Krista turned her head to face him, and spoke with intensity. "I have gone as far as you dare, right here in your straight-laced uncle's foyer. I have matched you in this game of touching, Ernst. I know you thought nothing of me before, and I knew I did not have much time to make an impression on you. But I have changed in everything but this: I still love you. I think I can be good for you, if you will let me. But I will let you go without a murmur, and not bother you again, if you can tell me right now that you will never, under any circumstances, love me back. Speak those words, Ernst, and you will be rid of me forever." She gazed into his eyes, challenging him directly. Her thighs squeezed his hand.

Ernst returned her gaze and opened his mouth. She had offered him exactly what he wanted. But he found that he could not speak the words. She was beautiful. She was ardent. His hand was captive between her legs, and his eyes were captive to hers. "You have not matched me, Krista, you have beaten me," he confessed. "I am interested in you, now, and can not say I will never love you."

"Then will I be your *Mädchen*?"

He shrugged, not because of indifference, but because he had no way to deny her. "If you wish. For now."

She leaned over and kissed him. "Then I am yours. For now."

He remained surprised at this development, but oddly satisfied. His family would be pleased at the success of their ploy, but that was the least of it.

Then there was the tread of someone approaching the foyer. They sprang apart as if there had been an explosion between them, and were abruptly decorous.

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