

WAR WHORE
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Complete text

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CHAPTER 1

Sept 30, 1939

Karen Lubinska looked around at the room, waking up from an uneasy, but interesting night of dreaming. Maybe her 26 going on 56 year old spirit was more tired than she thought. Or maybe she had aged 30 years overnight without realizing it. Such was life in the 'hotel room' as she called it.

It could have been worse. It could have been a cell in C-Block where rats were pets, and roaches an evening imperatif. It could have been B-Block, where visitations from men were not only allowed, but encouraged, particularly if they wore badges. Or it could have been anywhere with anyone else.

"The hotel room" was a single occupancy no frills special measuring 6 by 7 feet squared with the yardstick, but it could be bigger if you thought beyond it. "Gee, it looks like another cloudy day outside," she said gazing at the grey wall that, on some days, looked bright blue, some days sunny and on some days resembled a Rembrandt. But today, the weather outside was 'grey and cloudy'. She could feel it, and see it when she looked into the mirror.

"Hmmm", she reflected tossing the blonde mop away from her bloodshot eyes. "Ten more grey hairs this morning. But I still HAVE hair," she thought. "Not like Cathy in B block who didn't please her man, and guard, enough. It'll take her another three years to grow it back. Then again, the redneck assholes don't like women with crew cuts, so maybe she's luckier than she thinks. But it'll make it harder for her to find love from another woman in here. And women in here is where it counts...or used to." Karen reflected, then gazed down to the crack in the corner. "Hey!" she screamed at the black figure coming out of it like a ghost from another time, place and dimension. "What do YOU think about all this, Carlos."

Even Karen was surprized that she called her pet cockroach Carlos. Maybe it was a 'she', deserving to be called Carlita. But Carlita or Carlos, it came back to the same source. "Carlos. Nice to see you in a life form I can talk to, and dominate. Now, I talk, and you listen. And if I want to, I can crush you like a bug, since you treated me like a maggot, you mother fuckin..."

Carlos made a run for the breakfast tray snuck under the door. It was a piece of stale toast, moldy jam and butter that smelled like something that had been eaten by the cook first, but it was breakfast. And Karen wouldn't let Carlos beat her to the punch again.

"It's mine!" she screamed out, grabbing the tray, throwing the roach up in the air and against a wall. The bug went splat, then fell to the floor. Then, a tear from her eyes. The first time in months that she expressed any emotions except rage or depression, or dispondency. "Carlos, I'm sorry," she lamented, stroking the bug. "I didn't mean to hurt you, I love you, I really do..."

With her soul held hostage by guilt, grief and regret, the bug made its move, hopping onto the toast, making itself comfortable in a bed of something that was supposed to resemble butter and jam in the softest part of the bread.

"I guess you win, again," she said, feeling her belly ache with hunger again. Hoping that this day would go fast, or that the next 20 years would magically transpire in the next two hours so she could get on with her life.

Behind the walls, somewhere above her, she heard an angelic choir. "Glory be to God in the Highest" rang out from voices wih renewed stregnth, vision and revealing between the notes and within the lines, an emotion seldom expressed, or felt, at Randerhart Prison---

"Hope, Carlos. The voices are hopeful this time." She sighed, opening up her diary, picking up a pencil that had been worn down to a three-inch stub, and drew the symbol that landed her in the hole in the first place. "Hammer and sickle, Comrade Cochroach. It isn't written anywhere that Jesus condemns Communist New York hookers to 25 years in an Alabama jail. And I think that Jesus would have been a Bolshevik. Certainly a Trotskyite. And He would have been the first one on the battlelines in 1917 to tear down the palaces of gold crufixes paid for by the suffering of 'God Fearing' Christians whose children died of starvation while they died of grief. But what about you, Carlos?"

The bug sat there and ate. Nothing from him, and everything from the voices above her head, echoing in her mind like a knife ready to tear open her heart and her soul. "Stop that! Stop that! For the Love of Humanity! Religion is poison! Poison! Poison!"

But the choir got louder. Karen shook with fear, a coldness overtaking her that was not just another early morning chill on a floor as hard as rock and twice as impersonal. On every other Sunday, she knew it was the early morning service where God-fearing prisoners could express themselves in song with emotions they dared not reveal in words, or actions, the rest of the week. Maybe if Karen feared God, she would be rewarded, too. But the God who existed behind the alters of the God that everyone else worshipped demanded that Karen remain Alive in a dead or dying world.

"I know! I know!" she yelled at the other end of the hotel room, to another wall, beyond which another friend lived on a good day. "Merlina, I know that you want me to make the world a freer place! I know that you want me to take the sword and cut the chains of Capitalistic oppression. And I know that you're there to help me. You have to be. But why me? And why did I wind up here? And why with a brain that could outthink Einstein and a body that could make Mary Pickford look like a herford cow, did I land in here?"

The answer was obvious. "Carlos," she said to the bug. "It was you out there, and in here. Adam lost his perspective to a babe offering him an apple, and me...all it took was a touch of your gentle fingers on my cheek, lips, breasts and..."

The rest of the details were best forgotten. As was what the human Carlos did to set her up for the visit to the first 'hotel room' in Upstate New York. For the bust, and the information on the other Socialists in Greenwich Village, Carlos became the first Mexican-American FBI agent to make the rank of Inspector. Karen was the first Socialist Whore busted for soliciting and conspiracy.

As for the second visit to 'the Alabami hotel suite' which were her current lodgings, it started in a hotel room in Manhattan. Two tycoons with money to burn, and an unidentified 'friend' who killed the capitalist fat cats' reputation in print. Somehow, the rap was put around Karen's neck, and Soul, all tied up in a bow by a G-man who jumped up the ladder in DC by doing a bang-up job prosecuting the NYC Socialist Whore who wouldn't be missed, or noticed, by anyone important.

She lamented on it all, discerning what she did, and wanted to do, to the men, and God, responsible for the verdict. She recalled what the God-fearing Judge said. "I'll see you die in jail, young lady," he scolded from the back of the bench. "You will die unheard, un-noticed, and alone," the final prophesy.

"He was right, Carlos," she said. "Or maybe I should make it right."

The tool to make everything right lay in a crack under the East wall. A small sliver of metal no bigger than a nail file but sharp as a razor. One slash and it would be over, as long as it was fast, and deep, and she didn't scream.

Maybe it was the dream the night before, or maybe the life before the nightmare with Carlos. But this was the time, and this was the place. She picked up the sliver of silver-plated 'sharp', closed her eyes, and said a silent prayer to her three heros. "Buddha, Lenin and Jesus..the real Jesus. I wrote down everything I have to say in this diary. The last chapter, we'll write in blood, together, right? I don't want to die insane, so while I still know what I'm doing all this for, or think that I know why I'm continuing the struggle for Global Liberation---"

Karen's silent prayers were always cluttered with words, as was her heart always infiltrated with thoughts and re-assessments. It made her the most interesting hooker below 23rd Street, and the most dangerous. But it was time for---

"Okay, fellas, lets do this thing right!" she said taking the hand-crafted knife and making the first slit. But as she made the first light mark, from above...silence.

"They stopped, Carlos!" she noted. "In the middle of the---"

A knock echoed in from the door, no eyes behind it. "Karen, open the door," a calm, intelligent male voice beconed her.

Was this the incarnation of the Godhead and the Godheart come to rescue her? No one had spoken to her in such a human tone, and called her by her Christian-Jewish name. And it was a man! Woman sought, and often obtained, Karen's affection in a carnal way while in the joint. She gave them compassion, but never love. That was reserved for...the Man Upstairs, or Inside. Was He knocking at her door, saving her from killing herself, in the nick of time.

The door clicked. "It's open. Please open the door," he said.

Carlos fled into the woodwork, or rather cement-cracks. Karen's mind raced as fast as it could to intuit who it was, and why. Her maternal Jewish genetics said it was like when Abraham stood above his beloved son with a knife to his throat, prepared to sacrifice him to the Heavenly Father, who called the deal off once he saw that Old Abe was willing to do the ultimate sacrifice for His will. Her paternal Polish Catholic side said it was the Virgin Mary saying that everything really WILL be okay on the other side. But on the other side of what? After Karen became overcome with a universal compassion for humanity, the notion of Heaven or Hell became irrelevant. And as for the man, or Spirit, on the other side of the now open door---

"Who are you?" she inquired with all the bravado she could muster, holding the blade in her clenched fist, prepared to use it on herself if Buddha demanded it, or on the Devil if that was who was inviting her into the next---

The door swung open, the figure entering. He was clad in black from head to toe, the look of determined indifference in his eyes, but still, determination. His eyes were cold brown, his complexion pale, his face chissled in a classic form that said 'official'.

"Karen Lubinska?" he asked.

"Yeah. That's still me, I think."

"You're coming with me," he said firmly.

"And if I don't want to?"

"You're coming with me," he repeated, offering her an open door. Guards behind him had their weapons holstered. No cuffs, no rifles. An offer that couldn't be refused, for any normal revolutionary radical idealist. But Karen had to ask...

"No cuffs, no irons?"

The visitor showed no emotion, the worse emotion of all.

"And no non-sense under the sheets!" she asserted, a volcano of fear under the venier of calm she had learned to wear like a paper-thin coat against the snow-blowing wind. "And besides, even if you did have your way with me, no one died from that kind of violation, unless they took the whole thing personally, which I don't."

The visitor smiled, lookd downward and took out a newspaper. He threw it to her. She opened it up, reading the headlines.

"Germany attacks Poland, Stalin and Hitler continue non-aggression Pact."

Even Karen's heart-broken heart dropped to the floor. Nazis invading her father's homeland. And Comrade Stalin just letting him do it. She suspected that Stalin was more of a Bolshevik than a Socialist, and that Trotsky should have inherited the throne of the only country that could save the world from a greed-is-good Capitalism that would destroy humanity. But Mother Russia friends with the Fatherland that vowed to kill so many Jews, and others? Her heart asked the question, "What can I do?"

"Your country needs you," the visitor said, reading the question in her tear-soaked, shell-shocked face.

He looked familiar, and sounded like someone she knew.

"Yes, Miss Lubinska," the ex-G man DA who was now far above cases like her now said anticipating her next question. "It IS me, and I see that you still are you. A lawless bitch who we need to break the balls, and will of even more lawless bastards."

"And if I refuse?" Karen inquired. "Me and Carlos have a, ya know, thing going on."

He shook his head, not having to say the obvious consequences of refusing the offer. "You're coming with me," he said, walking down the hall. Karen bid a fond farewell to the roach who had become her friend, smelling the crap from a 'higher' source of vermin in her gut.

CHAPTER 2

Oct 3, 1939

Karen hadn't had a real bath since her arrest in '33. Showers just didn't do it, even when she was allowed the most prized luxury in prison---privacy. But here she was, in a real tub, with real soap, feeling

real skin under the grimey sac covering her tired bones. Maybe it was a set up, maybe it was a forged newspaper, but in the joint, you learn to take what you can from any good 'maybe' that comes your way.

The list of charges in '34 was long against Karen, ranging from double homicide all the way over (but not down) to 'disturbing the peace' in rallies in Washington demanding that Roosevelt oust Hitler from office by any means possible. Even ardent Pacifist Einstein had switched camps, doing whatever he could to push the American Eagle into attack mode against a regime that was primary evil. After talking with Einstein, Karen was convinced, breaking ranks with most of her Socialist Pacifist Comrades, most notably friend and sometimes lover ex-blue blood Michael Wilson. But it was Einstein she remembered most fondly from those last golden days of freedom and free expression.

"Albert was a kind man," she thought to herself as she plowed through a copy of the NY Times, uncensored and with all the pages intact. She spotted a picture of him someplace on page 13, taken someplace and someplace that made him look old, and lonely. She remembered the cup of coffee she shared with him on that cafe just outside of Princeton, a cup of java that lasted ten hours, maybe more. "If he wasn't married, I would have given him a freebee, maybe even with the love thrown in, no charge. But Elsa..I couldn't do it to her, even though Albert needed something he wasn't getting from her."

"Which brings us to you," a voice echoed from behind her.

The visitor walked in, helped himself to one of the chocolates put out for her, a sip of the complimentary champagne, and a look at Karen's body under the suds.

"I think you'll do just fine," he commented. It was the kind of emotion that Karen feared most---detachment, and business. She held her arms folded over her breasts.

"What's this about?" she demanded. "And who the hell are you?"

He opened her file, reading it with a mixture of admiration and condescension, a blend of agendas that smelled dangerous, perhaps deadly.

"Your biggest wish is to liberate the world, Miss Lubinska. Nothing else matters, or ever did, of ever should."

"Okay, Mister Black, you've read my diary. What about me?"

"The real question, Miss Lubinski, is 'what about freedom' and what about what you can do about everyone losing it." He sat down and read from another transcript."You have slept with no less than 200 men in your career, according to the legends, which if they are even half true---."

Karen shrugged. The A-plus journalism student remembered what the newspapers had done to her reputation, as well as that of her immigrant parents, in the interest of sales. In that American spirit of competition, she continued. "Let's up the story about me to three hundred boinks in the sack, and when those men were with me, they didn't sleep, Mister Black."

"My name is White. Buck White," he said with a smile that seemed---honest, at least for the moment. "In my line of work, I--"

"--Arrest Communists, Socialists, Nigger lovers, Union Activists and anyone else who challenges the Street that rules the world."

"And what street would that be?"

"Wall Street. Ten, twenty of a hundred assholes on top with all the money, making it off the backs, and lives of everyone else who does the fighting. Like World War I, another 'For King and Country' war

brought to you by the bankers in England and Germany to make profits in arms sales while dumb-shit Yankee Doughboys went over---

"---To give their lives for their country!" White asserted in a soft voice that echoed authority, and pain. "Like my brother, you spoiled Socialist bitch!"

"I'm sorry," Karen offered apologetically, a tone of communication rarely given or received since her inevitable arrest and swift conviction.

"You protested American involvement in WWI?" White asked.

"We protested the war itself. Then the government that took away the freedoms that YOUR brother died to keep."

The bullet hit White in the heart, and the gut. Still, this was a new war, with a new agenda, and a very new recruit who needed to know some things, but not others.

"You were arrested and convicted for treason, espionage against your own government, and---

"---Corrupting the minds of the men who fuck up our Democracy by letting them fuck my body?"

White took a deep breath. This would be harder than he thought, but there was no other way to play it, for him, and for Comrade Lubinska.

"Here's the deal, Miss Lubinska. What you did to those three hundred 'fuckees', and tried to do to our government, I want you to do to the Nazis."

"And their allies?" she added.

"Stalin and Hitler are in bed with each other. That makes your Comrade Stalin---

"---My next mark?"

"Customer."

"My Victim?"

"Enemy."

"And Executioner, which will happen by accident after I get him to spill the beans on whatever you ask me to talk about under the sheets?"

White hesitated. "Only if you don't do exactly what we say."

"And if I do what I'm ordered, Herr White?"

"You'll die doing something important, and effective. And if you're lucky, maybe you'll live long enough to remember what you did."

"Which is?"

"Nothing you can tell anyone else about, for a long, long time."

White handed Karen a towel, another man clad in black bringing in a red dress, stilleto heels and a complete make-up kit matched to her freshly-re-discovered skin. "Get dressed. We don't have much time."

CHAPTER 3

“Nature is not our master, but our servant,” said the credo on the lab walls of the 300 year old Halsburg Institute, in Russian and German. Michael read the new daily maxim with mixed feelings. “I always was an if-it’s-good-you-gotta-make-it-great kind of guy, he commented from his under-thirty mouth with an under-thirty Yankee spunk, but an over-the-hill burn out face. He turned to the men in the long white coats with the austere German and faces. “This means that the experiments have to work today.”

“If we want to be breathing above ground tomorrow,” Alexi added in Russian.

“Or we want to keep our families fed,” Hans Bruchner added in German.

Michael Wilson looked at the laboratory notes, and new expectations, and the letterhead Hammer and Sickel merged with the Swastika.

Alexi turned around. “You look like an old man, almost as old as me.”

“We’re damned if we do and damned if we don’t,” Michael’s reply.

“Are you having second thoughts?” Hans asked.

The Boston-blue blood born to money who had become new King of the American Socialist movement hesitated. It was the kind of question that couldn’t be answered honestly. Indeed, no question could be answered honestly in Mother Russia or the Fatherland. Wilson had already made his stand when he left America, leaving his passport and his past behind to help build a new People’s Paradise in the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1917 he was a zealot. By ’27 he was an optimist. In ’29, with the crash of Wall Street that toppled economies across the world, he forced himself to become a believer. But after the Ukrainian holocaust of ’31, un-noticed by even the most astute Western journalists, he became fired up with a motivation stronger than any political mandate. Now, in 1939, he made his own rules, feeling the political waters around him carefully, and quietly, deflecting winds of war and currents of suspicion move things the way he wanted them to go, or hoped they would.

“Michael?” Alexi asked the American who everyone liked, and seemed to trust.. “We have to get back to work.”

Michael looked into Alexi’s face, a canyon of wrinkles deepened by the emotional sadness and spiritual depth that was uniquely Russian. He could have been KGB, or converted into informing on a friend to save relative from a stint in a labor camp, or worse. One out of every ten “Comrades” always were, as part of the temporary measures required for Socialism to survive on the world stage.

“I’m okay,” Michael noted. “It’s just that...today.”

“Thanksgiving?” Hans asked in English, remembering the turkey dinners at Harvard and Yale. “You miss thanksgiving, Michael.”

“Yes, Hans, I suppose I do.” The soft-spoken Prussian aristocrat was German, but he was working for the Nazis, ultimately serving a man who was deluded or a conduit for trapping them in before they knew they should get out.

Michael looked at the periodic chemical chart, knowing that it was only a matter of time till someone would create new elements and isotopes that could be used to destroy the world. Maybe it was heavy uranium, maybe heavy water. With the greatest number physicists per capita in the world, logic dictated that Germany would come up with the ultimate weapon of world domination first. He saw death all over the periodical chart, with his signature on it. Sabotaging the project with intentional mistakes in the data would ultimately be found out and, in the short term, would cost him his position of observation, or his life. And there were portions of the German biomedical weapons machinery, which he could never access. Scientists didn’t need new elements to destroy life, just chemicals, or life forms only observable under a microscope.

Michael stared into himself, and then was awakened by the touch of death on his shoulder.

“Huh!” he blasted out, scared half way to hell.

Before him lay the entire congregation, a sacrificial offering in the center of it.

“Happy Thanksgiving!” the laboratory staff yelled out with wide-open smiles bubbling over with friendship, and warmth, a browned goose with cranberry jelly on a large plate adorned with potatoes and parsley.

Michael was touched, his consciousness of politics overtaken with a desire for the simple days when morality was just doing right by the people around you, with whatever you had on hand.

“Yes, Happy Thanksgiving, Comrade,” Alexi offered.

“Heil Hitler!!!” Hans threw in with an enthusiasm that was dangerously contagious.

The lab bench was converted to a dining table; test tubes used as wine glasses, Bunsen burners keeping the comestibles of sweet potatoes and peas hot. Outside, snow started to fall. The first snow of the year in Hamburg. By the second snowfall, Michael would have to make HIS move. “Tis the season to be...decisive,” he thought to himself, fondling the letter in his pocket that could only be trusted to the most loyal of couriers.

CHAPTER 4

Karen Lubinska’s Polish father had taught her more than how to deal with her mother and the boys who came knocking at her door, and the knockers on her chest that sprouted prematurely and in perfect proportion to her body. Such is what she told her fellow language students at Camp X. Her fellow spies-in-training enjoyed the jokes she told about her relationships with her father. They took notes on how he put on different hats, languages and accents to survive in a Poland that belonged to German Kaiser or the

Russian Czar, depending on which way the political winds were blowing, and who had the most guns that week.

'Comrade Lubinska' learned well at the International Training Center in Canada that officially did not exist. Memory retention, weaponry repair, marksmanship, markswomanship, and most importantly, people manipulation skills were her areas of expertise. Terrified of heights, she learned parachute techniques faster than a man in her unit. Her skills were well documented to her superiors and her sponsor, Buck White, her motivation still uncertain. The latter was the issue of most concern to the people really in charge, the ones who wore no insignia and had offices without secretaries.

White had secrets and agendas of his own as well, equally admired and mistrusted by the Brass behind the Brass. He won critical acclaim for gathering evidence against Karen for murder of two of the top ten Tycoons on Wall Street, the hammer and sickle carved into their penis and chest. But as Karen whizzed through 3 months of training in a less than a month, she seemed ready to apply her skills someplace else.

To celebrate the occasion, he organized a private graduation for the Socialist whore whose alluring body was as much of a weapon as anything else in the Allied arsenal against whatever powers stood, or could stand, against them. Unlike the private party locations which preceded the murders at the Plaza hotel, this one was public, but just as opulent. Steak, lobster and crab, accompanied by sparkling champagne, all imported from semi-legal locations by less than legal sources to the Moose Lake Café, located in the Ontario town that opened its doors, and on rare occasions hearts, to the lads and lasses who were on 'special training' for an Army that wore no uniform. After the main course, White presented Karen with a letter, freshly delivered, opened on the spot.

It read, "At my personal recommendation, I trust you will hire Karen Lubinska for the position of research assistant. She is a loyal Comrade, a hard worker, and a fine example of the New Woman in science". The signature...Comrade Josef Stalin.

"I didn't know I was so popular," Karen said as she leaned over the table used as the Pub at Camp X.

"You aren't," White stated tersely. "This is the best forgery I've ever seen".

"Maybe it isn't a forgery then?" Karen offered, reaching for a bottle of Canadian beer, stronger in flavor and commitment to alcohol than the American dishwasher that Prohibition had tried so hard to repeal. "Maybe what I did here was noticed in Russia."

White thought a moment, doubting his instinct in the matter of Karen's trial and conviction. She was guilty of many things, but the two Tycoon murders? Maybe so, or maybe not. So many people were being murdered across the Pond in Europe.

Camp X was the Harvard of spy schools and Karen was a Community College Revolutionary. He stroked his recently grown goatee, adjusted his glasses and pondered the issue.

"How's Michael?" Karen asked, experiencing fresh lobster, yet another luxury in a month of training, which was filled with hard training in espionage work by day and a new perk every night.

"How well did you know him?" White continued.

"You tell me. You're the guys who know about everybody."

"You're one of the guys who are supposed to know about everybody now, Karen."

Karen put down the lobster. She recounted the Groucho line; "I wouldn't want to be part of any club that would have me as a member. Right?"

Her attempt to overcome fear with laughter fell on stone cold eyes. "You leave tonight," his reply. "The information we need and who you'll get it from will be given to you on the plane."

"And I'm supposed to get information from Nazis and Bolsheviks who are sworn to secrecy by...ya know..."

“Fucking them. Or letting them fuck you.” The harsh vernacular was seldom spoken by the Baptist Born-Again White. He meant it this time, literally.

CHAPTER 5

Despite the propaganda from above, the Griegaer Research Institute was run from below, not above. The building only ran when its engineer, and protector, Wilhelm Schroeder, decided that it did. He had the logbooks to everything - electrical output - oil for the furnaces - all the people going in and out. The facility officially didn't exist, and neither did Schroeder. Officially, he was killed in the First Great War. Unofficially he knew black market sales for everything from oil to heavy water to toxic gases to nylon and chocolate. But Michael asked for a favor, and the American turncoat was good for it.

“You want her to be taken care of?” Schroeder asked from his throne of power on the stool next to the furnace that provided heat and the generator that provided electricity without fail, twenty-four hours a day. “Of course, it will cost you.” The troll-like man with the big nose, triple chin, and fat forehead puffed on his cigarette, coughing the smoke out along with another lump of his lungs.

“You want more of my cigarettes from Stalingrad?” Michael asked.

“For a start.”

“Do you want her?” Michael advanced. “You get her in with the people we talked about, and you can have a poke at her yourself, if...”

“If what, Herr Wilson?”

“If she wants you to.”

Schroeder laughed. “I suppose she’ll want me to take a bath first. You Americans are so obsessed with being clean on the outside. Maybe it’s because you’re so dirty on the inside. Or she is.”

As usual, the mentor of mischief hit the mark dead on. It was impossible to be a Social Revolutionary in the United States without doing something to do hard to a friend, family member or co-worker, even if you were a Pacifist. An international world without Nations, War or Economic competition was so...un-American.

Schroeder could see the words forming behind Michael’s eyes.

“I tell you what I do, Professor Wilson. You tell me what information she gets from these big shot Nazis on your list and the big time Bolsheviks in your head, and I might tell you what they tell her.”

“How do you know she’ll confide in you, Wilhelm?”

“Everyone confides in Wilhelm Schroeder one day or another. Even you, Doctor Wilson, and do you know why, Michael?”

“Because you’re the most connected Black Marketer North of Marseilles?”

“Because I am Wilhelm, and not Herr Schroeder. I know about everyone else because no one knows about me.”

“And if I tell them?” Michael challenged.

“I’ll have to have you, and you family killed, slowly,” Schroeder replied calmly. “Those are my terms. Do you want to play?”

“I have to.”

“I know, Michael.” Schroeder took a long puff from the cigarette, his knobby fingers revealing an aristocratic bearing, or acquired habit. He put the butt out on the back of a roach partially paralyzed while trying to get way from the furnace. A clean kill, this time. “I’ll take care of the details.

“And how will I take care of you?”

“I’ll let you know, Professor Wilson.”

Michael handed Schroeder the information about Karen. It would be difficult to get her unofficially assigned as the whore of Hamburg, as there was lots of competition between the local girls, and any German or Russian officer could have his pick of Jewish prisoners. Still, he had to ask the critical question.

“Which side are you on, Wilhelm?”

“The side that ends up with the money,” his reply. “And as long as there is war, someone has money to spend on people like me.”

Wilhelm strolled out. Michael sweated another liter out of his shivering body. He looked at his pocket watch, a Russian-made model that had trouble keeping up with German time. It always ran slow,

and on some days not at all. He remembered the deal. A successful mission with Karen and a free pardon home. The only problem was that he still didn't know where home was, or should be.

CHAPTER 6

When you cross the border, you'll be needin' a special passport," the Cape Bretoner informed Karen as he left Karen at the pier in Halifax. War had taken so many prairie boys to sea. In keeping with the standards of excellence the Brits. maintained over the colonial militia, Elton Jones had been assigned to a land transportation unit because of his twenty very odd years at sea as a fisherman. "The Rock is a strange land, indeed. And a wonderful place, if it takes to ya."

"The Rock of Gibraltar?" Karen inquired.

“Newfoundland. And, of course Labrador, don’t ya know, Ducky,” he boasted. “One day, if they’re worthy of the venture, we might just be givin’ Canada a chance to join us.”

“Aren’t all you guys Canadians North of the 49th?” Karen asked as the gravel road turned into a row of potholes leading to a peer more rot than wood.

“Only to ya yanks. Doughboys in the First War. Know why we called ya that?”

“Cause we baked great bread.”

“Cause ya collected the dough after we wore out the Kaiser for three years before ya finally dragged your sorry asses over there.” His voice sounded bitter, then solemn, then indifferent. “Newfoundland lost more of its lads than any other part of Canada, or any other part of the bloody British Empire. Eight hundred men down ta barely 60 in half an hour. Commanded inta slaughter with gas, machine gun fire, and barbed wire.”

“By who?”

“Assholes like your boss,” he shot out from the side of his mouth.

“I’ll have to remember that,” Karen offered.

“Or maybe assholes like you, Ma’am.” He just kept driving, giving Karen nothing but his arched back, and a very closed ear.

Karen gazed downward, noting the 300 dollar wardrobe she was furnished at Camp X for her departure, the fine jewelry in her suitcases and the currency in her pocket, enough dollars, pounds and Deutchmarks to buy or sell a hundred Elton Jones’s. But there was the sealed envelope in her pocket containing her orders, to be opened at the other side of the Great Waters. Failure to follow orders would be death. Failure to follow protocol would be worse.

Jones stole a glance of his VIP passenger through the rear view mirror. Her eyes caught his. For the first time she knew she could never go home. Never again could she share a cheap trick with a rich dude for the money. Never again could she laugh about small things with one of the ‘little people’ upon whom her Socialist ideals were based. Never again could she feel the warmth of a man without first accessing his fire, or scaring him with hers. She felt...alone.

The final destination was a tugboat, which was to take her to an airplane, which was to take her someplace ‘important’ overseas. It had been a while since Karen had been someplace important, or even DID something important. All of her life she had been on the fringe, begging to have access to power, but being the possessor of knowledge, occasionally wisdom.

The truck screeched to a halt.

“We’re here, Major Lubinska,” Jones barked out in a muffled subservient tone.

“Major?” she asked.

“That’s what I was told you were.”

“Hmmm...Then I guess that’s what I am.”

Karen never thought she’d be promoted to anything except uptown whore, colorful slut or powerful bitch. ‘Major’ didn’t fit. But one thing did---the cold blast of Atlantic air blowing a chill through her bones. As she stepped on the shaky gangplank onto a boat that felt like it was about to sink with every plink of the propeller, she didn’t feel much like a Major of anything, much less her destiny, or chance of ever getting home again.

CHAPTER 7

Everyone talked about the Emerald Isle, and every writer, playwright or actor worthy of slugging whisky says he came from there. But to actually set foot on the beach was strange.

Palm trees and warm, misty rain, in November?" Karen inquired. "What the hell are palm trees doing here?"

"Growing. Making baby palm trees I guess, Comrade Major", the pilot replied with a Texas drawl.

The rising sun shone light on his shoulder, and what was covering it. "That's an American uniform. At least it used to be until you tore off the insignia, and that eagle," 'Major' Karen Lubinska inquired of her, to that point, silent pilot.

"You got a problem with that, Comrade?" he grunted out, head to the ground, nose to the grindstone as he took the locked boxes of gear marked "top secret" and "personables" off the plane.

"I just, ya know, think that the new military fashions, they work. But I bet they don't hold a candle, or a burning cross, to what the Luftwaffa is wearing this year. And that Anthem we got. Maybe if we Americans are serious about winning this war, we should hire a German songwriter to give us a song we can really march to, and a Russian color designer to do something with those severe red, white and blue lines we got on OUR---"

"--Your contact will meet you up the road. He'll take ya to yer next assignment, Ma'am."

"Which is where?" she asked. No bravado, no clever dig, just an honest question asked of a political enemy who she hoped would give him an honest answer. .

"What happened?"

"An unlucky morning in Madrid. Shrapnel from a German gun shot by Franco's goons," he commented while looking at the wooden stump that used to be the bottom half of his left leg.

"I hope you got a medal for you trouble, at least."

"I wasn't officially there."

"Were you unofficially there in an official capacity?"

The Texan smiled, paused a moment, then put the hook to work checking the wires and cables under the propeller,

"A lot of Socialists died in that war against Franco. The International Brigade. Michael was there, too. I wanted to go, but what could I do? Even if the prison guards in Alabama did let me out. Maybe entertain the troops? And, as I understand it, now I'll be entertaining the enemy troops." She gazed over the ocean, still dark against the incoming dawn. Suddenly, a thud, a lock opening on her special equipment box, the first issue of her weaponry becoming visible to 'Tex'.

"Nylons, slips, skirts, blouses, and three kinds of lipstick", the Texan noted.

"And one is flavored with cyanide, cowboy?" she somberly noted of the specially wrapped chocolates.

"Arsenic actually, Ma'am."

She smelled the candy in question. No odor. Clean. Worse---sterile. "You guys don't seem to trust my tenacity. I've had to learn to trust it, even when it wasn't there."

"If you get interrogated, you'll talk. Everybody does, Ma'am."

"I ain't everybody, Tex."

The cowboy-pilot shrugged, took off his wollen cap, and put on the Stetson hidden under the control panel. The thing that tortured Karen most. She inventoried her courage, bravado, and conviction then grabbed the cowboy by his good arm, pulling him into her.

"What the hell are you---?" he asked.

"Giving you a hug of appreciation,"

"Fer what?"

"Fighting Hitler in Spain when everyone back home was...ya know...not."

"I was just following orders, Ma'am."

“And I’m just following my convictions, Tex.” With that she kissed him on the cheek, feeling the most primal, and familiar, kind of rejection as he turned his eyes away from her, down to the floor and a world a million miles away that never did go away.

She read it in his eyes, felt it in his arms and heard it from his heart and confirmed it with the white ring around his left fourth digit.

“She was young, kind, sweet on good days,” he smiled. Turning to the other side of the emotional coin of ‘love’ Karen promised but never cashed in on, he continued. “Then she turned on me like a rattlesnake. Or maybe I was the rattlesnake. Away from home ten months a year protecting my country, ignoring her. At least there was no kids.”

“At least that you know about?” She mused with a Russian accent.

“Hmmm”, he muttered through a laugh that wanted to come out.

“A deal, Tex. You take out a renewal on that cowboy virginity of yours and I’ll give you a buckaroo round up in the hayloft when all of this is over. Or---maybe now?”

Karen found the words falling out of her mouth faster than she could think them, or even feel them. Giving herself away so easily, and with no reason other than the urgency and passion of the moment? Then again, urgency was everywhere and passionate warmth was so...welcomed. She envisioned it all. She gets pregnant by a Texas pilot, and loses everything. White had told her that if she gets pregnant, she should kill the baby along with herself. Orders. Everything was orders, now. And for what? Maybe stealing her reward now, on this Irish beach, with a cowboy from her imagination that was very real, needy and accessible. She moved in, feeling a ‘yes’ coming out of every pore of his sweat-drenched body, when from behind---

“Major Karen, would that be you on this fine mornin’?” the impish, deformed man with the big nose, beer belly and stubby arms yelled out in an Irish brogue.

She turned around and noted a small man. More head than body. His green hat, wool sweater and impish walk make him seem more like a Leprechaun than a contact.

He danced his way across the beach grasses, hopping in front of Karen.

“Who the hell are you?” she asked

“Wilhelm”, he replied, clicking his heels.

“Tex?” Karen gasped, turning around to see her cowboy already in the saddle, starting up the propeller, taxiing down the beach, then lifting off the white cliffs, nearly scraping the rocky edges.

Karen waved goodbye to Tex, throwing him a kiss. Maybe he’d see it, certainly if there was any God anywhere he’d feel it. Then, a loud honk of a boat in the inlet.

“The ship’s ready anytime you are,” Wilhelm informed Karen, in a diction that sounded awesomely familiar.

“You’re from New York? Brooklyn?”

“Anywheres ya wants me to be from, Comrade Karen”, he stated in his natural diction and a crude sounding German dialect that slurred every consonant just as hillbilly Southerners do to intentionally butcher Northern-based American English. He translated it back into Brooklynese “Merican” in the event that Karen’s recently-upgraded German wasn’t up to snuff yet, and bowed to her in Hoch Prussian German, leading ‘his Baroness’ to the tugboat manned by the capped seaman clad in the uniform of the day---plain Irish civilian.

Two ‘porters’ with muddy faces turned downward, smelling of cod and seaweed, approached from the beach grass. The fishing boat eased into the sandy bottom.

No one looked more inviting and cordial than Wilhelm, the exact reason why Karen had to ask the logical question, “I think I know who I am, but who the hell are you?”

“Your best friend if you let me. Your protector, your financier, your personal manager, your provider, confidant and connection to whoever and whatever you want.”

“My pimp”, Karen noted.

“Splendid”, Wilhelm replied, in English. “I am so glad we understand each other.”

It was an offer that couldn't be refused. Finally, someone who spoke the truth to her as soon as she asked for it. Carlos refused to, Buck White was under orders to be 'selectively truthful', Tex couldn't be honest, and as for Michael...

“Does he still love me?” Karen asked

“I think so”, Wilhelm replied.

“I hope you're wrong”, she confessed as she walked toward the German-driven fishing boat bearing the Irish flag of neutrality. “The last thing I need now is someone who loves me.”

Wilhelm didn't need to ask any more questions. The answers were in Karen's eyes. He could read her like a book, with large print, and in any language. But there was one more directive that had to be delivered.

“Comrade Karen, I am your agent in this mission---“

“Paid by?”

The same friends you have.”

“Which side?”

Wilhelm laughed. “The side with the money, of course”, he replied in Brooklynese, “It's the American way”.

CHAPTER 8

The journey from Dublin to Denmark was simple. The Vikings did it in times of old when Dublin ruled the world, with a Nordic king, and a unified objective. The radio in the cabin blasted out Wagner's 'Flying Dutchman' overture just as the Danish coast was visible, the swastika boldly displayed on the lighthouse.

“Great musical accompaniment,” Karen said to herself from the deck in a voice. “Inspirational chorus that anyone can goosestep to, or---”

“---Cry to?” Wilhelm added, a world of pain behind his glossy eyes.

Karen turned around, noticing him standing within feeling distance of her ears. “You walk quietly, Wilhelm”.

“That’s because I don’t gosestep,” he replied with renewed purpose, and a proud, understated smile. “You ask dangerous questions, Comrade Major.”

Karen took another look at the specially-made, skin-tight Russian uniform that she had put on for her arrival. “I didn’t know the Red Army had such great fashion sense for women”.

“For your brigade, special tailors were brought in.”

“What brigade is that?”

“The ‘morale builder’ brigade loosely translated. My Russian is not so good.”

“A company of whores?”

“It worked for the Mexican Army during their War of Liberation. The ladies of comfort went everywhere with Poncho Villa, Zapata, Obregon and Diaz. Certain pleasures under the blanket on the evening before the battle were denied to men who had to fight, or think, the next day, for good reasons. But give a man a kiss as he goes off to battle, and he’ll give everything he has for the rest of it after the battle is over.” Wilhelm took out two cigarettes, offering Karen one.

“No thanks. I don’t smoke.

“Yes, you do, when a man offers you one, Comrade Major.”

Karen took the cigarette, put it in her mouth. It felt rough around her lips. Hot when Wilhelm lit a match, moving it closer to the tip, then edging it in to her right cheek, then her left, singeing her flesh.

“Go ahead, Wilhelm. If I’m damaged goods, you have a damaged reputation, and a damaged income.”

The impish ‘pimp’ withdrew the match, placing it an inch ahead of the tip of her cigarette. “I like you Karen. But there is one thing I am cautious about.”

“What?” Karen blasted back.

“That I might love you,” he confessed.

“As long as you’re holding the match, that’s not going to happen,” Karen affirmed, gently, blowing a puff of smoke into the air, tempted to blow it into his face, or another orifice behind him.

CHAPTER 9

In New York it was exotic. In Europe it was the norm. The meeting between Michael and Karen was to take place over lunch on Dec. 4, on schedule, and it did, in a café built at the time of Martin Luther, still retaining its 300 year old dedication to distinction, class and a very clean form of beauty. From the perfectly-constructed wooden boards to the emaculately served whippedcream-covered cocoa and precision-cut apple strudel. A train on the mountain road behind the café moved into the station, all parties leaving and entering the train doing it with effortless and prideful precision. He pulled the pocketwatch out of his plain but tastefully grey suit and looked at it, then its larger ‘relatives’. The clocks on the street ticked out their cadence, the smiling pedestrians walking in tune with it, concerned only with the musical score assigned to them by their Conductor, Meastro Adolf.

“Everything in Germany runs on time now, including your arrival,” Michael said as he sipped from his cup. He looked up at Karen, focused on who he was now, and who Karen used to be. “The gang-of-thirty-three were rounded up a month after the invasion of Poland, Kerry”.

“Kerry?” Karen smiled fondly, recalling different times with different names, and agendas. “You still remember that”.

“I remember everything about you,” he sighed, putting down the cup, and his official demeanor.” The good, the bad, the not so bad, and the not so perfect. There’s been no one since you, Kerry”.

“Yeah. No one since you too, Mikey,” she smiled at him, extending her hand gently to his shaking forearm.

Mikey and Kerry’s eyes carried on the rest of the conversation. Certainly no Gestapo monitor or KGB watchdog was interested in matters of deep love or soul gripping hate.

She remembered the time they met at Washington Square. He spoke first.

“You were reading Das Capital, and not hiding the cover, from the Cops or anyone else, Kerry,” he remembered.

“You were the first man who took me home, ”, she recalled “And didn’t give a shit about any Federal goon or Pinkerton was following you....us.”

“And you were the first person I, ya know, ‘did’ it with. At least part of the way.”

“And you were the only one who I...” Karen said, in words slipping out of her mouth, avoiding the ‘L’ one.

“But you and Carlos, that FBI informant who put you in jail for not ratting on the rest of us Socialists?” Michael noted in an accusing tone.

“The first time for both of us Michael.”

“And so many after that, Karen. I can count my intimate experiences on one hand.” Michael waited for the body count. The number of men she had given her virginity to, or said she had. “How many!?” he demanded. “I have to know. It’s business now.”

“The whole way?” Karen offered, fearful that her sins and secrets would be revealed all too early to a man whom she never stopped loving.

Michael sat back and folded his arms, His roundish warm face became chisled, long hard, and cold, “How many notches on your pistol, Comrade Lubinska?”

Karen raised up her hand in a gesture that had become typically British and globally-inspirational.

“A victory sign, Karen?” Michael raised his eyebrow. “You want to talk politics now. Or is it...two hundred men who you...”

Karen nodded ‘no’, very affirmatively.

“A hundred men and a hundred women, or men who wanted to be women?” he mused.

An eyerolls from his former ad perhaps regained lover negated that speculation. Then, a hard realization.

“You’ve only gone the whole trip with TWO guys?” Me and---?”

“---Someone who’s going to stay anonymous, Michael. And no, it’s not me.”

Michael’s face dropped. “Shit!” he exclaimed loudly beneath an angry whisper. “NOW you tell us.”

“The hooker charges were a frame. But they fit easily around me. Then came the whipped cream dressings of treason, murder, fraud, and---“

“---Does Buck White know this, Karen?” Michael demanded.

“I let him think what he had to, or wanted to. It got me out of jail, and over here, so I could do what I’ve been wanting to do for the last 6 years in the slammer.”

“Kick Adolf Hitler’s ass back to an electric chair in Austria, ‘Major Lubinska’?”

She hesitated, letting her heart talk before her brain. “To be here with you sipping chocolate. And after work is over...” Karen let her body do the talking. Her hand found its way to Michael’s arm gently stroking it.

Michael felt a twinge go down his spine, a warmth behind his eyes, and a third leg popping out under his trouser zipper. “Ya know, I think this will work out after all.”

“I hope so, no...PRAY so,” the officially-Marxist atheistic Karen confessed. “I hope you don’t doubt me now.”

“Hey, Karen. You can fake foreplay and the cunt tease better than any Marlina or Fraulein I’ve met over here. You’re a natural hooker, slut and whore. And you do it with class.”

Karen’s jaw dropped, her eyes looking for a place inside her head to hide in again.

He grinned, confidently. “And that sincerity thing you’ve got going...If you can fake that.”

Karen smirked. Perhaps Michael would understand what she was really feeling at a later time, after ‘work’ was done with. But for now, it was about getting ‘in’ with the scientists who were working on the latest German, or perhaps Russian, doomsday weapon.

“His name is Herman, but he liked to be called ‘Hermie’”, Michael related, handing over the dossier on the most brilliant scientist in Germany, perhaps because he was the least well known.

Karen opened the file, took a glance at the data, but how to hook in Herman to turning in his data, and turning on his country, didn’t register in the head, or mind. What she had to work on was the heart. His picture indicated smart in the head but lonely behind the eyes, at least on the left side of the face. As for the right side of the face, there was another ‘creature’. One which was more vicious than any guard at the Alabama Pen. And one which had to be won over, or not only she, but everyone she knew, or wanted to know, would be behind bars in a Nazi prison of no return.

CHAPTER 10

“It’s simple,” the very civilian-clad Professor-Doctor Herman Neilson, related to Karen in his office, sitting behind a large oak desk, hiding behind a smoke screen of cherry-flavored Virginia-grown tobacco below the obligatory photo of the Fuhrer. “The matter-antimatter conversion principle allows us to make anything out of anything else, working off of Einstein’s principles and others’ extrapolations of such.” He took another puff, twirling his mustache in a manner that made the gray and brown bush look more like regulation face-wear for the Kaiser’s war against France than the Fuhrer’s obsession to conquer the world. “Yes, we can convert matter to energy now, and make matter anything we want to.”

“Just like every professor and his graduate student,” she added in English. She subtly opened the knee-to-crotch slit on her regulation calf-length skirt. It was something she learned a long time ago. A long slit on a long skirt was always more alluring than even the most seductive leg shown naked. It was about hiding what she had, and letting the guys see what she wanted them to see, on her timetable. Even thunder thighs could be made to seem like they held up the body of Miss America, of Fraulein Fatherland, if indeed there was a beauty passion in Germany. If so, or if not, it was ugly, and any presence of beauty was valued, and valuable. Maybe she could still feel beautiful. Even with the gleaming eye of ‘Professor Herman’

assessing how he would transform her matter into a warped energy. But that was what this was all about, a warp in...

“We will continue this in seventy light minutes, Comrade Scientist Lubinska,” he ordained in a soft, but affirmative voice, noting an SS Officer in the hallway. The officer had in his eye the ‘you are doing well, I trust’ stare. The kind that made scientists produce results, or fake them. And by the fear under his bravado, Professor Hermann had much to be afraid of.

Maybe his experiments were all talk and little confirmation. Or maybe another scientist was about to discredit him, stealing Herman’s discoveries, glory and the power for him, or herself. “Maybe I can steal his secret rocket fuel and blackmail all the men of power in the world to respect the women and children who have so little of it,” she thought to herself. “Or maybe he’ll tell me why he closed the draw to his most prized discoveries when the SS goon peeked a glance through the door,” she pondered. “Or maybe this is just another demento who thinks it’ll be a hot time in the old town if I vomit into his crotch or piss on his head,” she considered. “Or maybe he’ll want to shit all over me. Hell, at least I’m used to it, I think.”

Two uniformed soldiers wearing white lab coats escorted her out of the room, with a bow and a warm, respectful smile. “Juden something” she noted from them in fast rattling German regarding something not so good about Jews. The object of their lower-German ranting was in the street below them, which Karen noted quickly and discretely. An old man with a noble face wearing rags as a coat, a Star of David on his arm, scars from three slashes across the cheek. He pushed a wheelbarrow along the cobblestone street. Inside were two suitcases, some books and a dog.

“He reminds me of someone,” Karen slurred out of the side of her mouth, her heart on her sleeve, her ever-thoughtful mind lost in the memory of an immigrant father she knew for so brief a period.

“The dog?” one of the guards said in his best English.

“Yeah. I had one like that at home,” Karen replied.

“When we win the war, you can OWN that home, ant the entire town it comes in,” goofy-goon number two commented with an extremely sincere smile.

“Own Brooklyn? No one will ever own Brooklyn,” she boasted.

“Then you can sell it.”

“Huh?” her reply as the old man turned a corner, the contents of the barrow falling out, the books remaining on the street, the bindings broken by a jeep whizzing by, papers flying in the air, settling into the sterile gutters that stank of pure Evil.

“The Brooklyn Bridge,” Goofy-goon number 1 remarked through his 21-year-old smile. “I heard you can get rich selling it many times.”

Goon number 2 whimsically smiled as they escorted Karen to her hotel room across the street.

The instructors at Camp X informed Karen that the Allies had already won the Intelligence Game in this war against Fascism. It had nothing to do with intellect, but innovation. “A spy who thinks on his, or her, own is ten times more powerful than one that takes orders,” she remembered from ‘coach’ Buck White. “But disobey even one of our orders, and you’ll wish you were dead.”

The next order was tall indeed. From Michael to her. “Get into Herman’s head, heart and data books,” the command. “By tomorrow night,” the timetable.

CHAPTER 11

The hotel register said the room belonged to Karen Lubinska, but the subtext under the print said anything but. Still, it was a luxury holding cell, levels above her accommodations in the slammer back in the States. “Soft blue walls, flower scented soap, sweetly flavored strudel and salty caviar,” she noted in the voice that she had to speak to confirm that the dialogue between mind and soul was still active. “But I wonder what’s under the sheets.”

She pulled open the covers on the specially ordered blanket featuring the Nazi Eagle gently resting atop the politically-required Hammer and Sickle and found a rose. It smelled gentle. It had been a long time since Karen had smelled anything gentle, and it made her uncomfortable, uneasy and scared.

Then, a knock on the door. “Comrade Fraulein?” the high-pitched voice said.

“Room service?” Karen asked of the tall, clean-shaven, chisel-faced servant who looked more Old World than New. A familiar face which seemed paler than expected in the areas that had been shaven, his hair cut short, very recently by the lack of split or strangely ends.

“Ya. Your friend want that everything was to satisfaction” he said with German diction that made his English barely understandable, keeping his eyes downward, his smile firmly fixed with no change of expression or subtext, wheeling in a hot dinner for two under cold steel covers.

“ ‘Friend’ is one word in English...many meanings,” she noted, sensing something familiar about the voice. “Comrade covers it all in Russia,” she asserted in English to see what would come back, noting the white band of skin around his fourth finger on the left hand.

“Partner does it everywhere else, Ma’am,” the comeback, in downhome Texas English.

“Tex?” Karen whispered, astonished and shocked.

“Code name Lillie, Major Karen,” his reply, delivered softly to, under the blaring music of a radio he turned on .

“You...eh---” Karen inquired, jaw dropped.

“-- Look different without my mustache, sideburns and bushy topknot? Scared me when I looked in the mirror after lopping it off, too. Scared me a lot harder when all this goose-steppin’ heel-clickin’ came too naturally.”

“But how, when...why?”

“Please accept this flower at the compliments of the hotel,” he said in German, inserting a carnation under her lapel, a hard metal microphone under its soft texture, a remote tape recorder to be inserted into her more private parts soon, no doubt. All according to the orders she was told to not tell anyone else who was not on Buck White’s approved list.

Karen knew that technology had advanced since she was framed with a doctored tape recording back in ’34 when Carlos pieced together words into sentences that would convict Santa Clause of being a child molester with a breaking-and-entering yellow sheet. Knowing about a crime was enough to convict you of doing it. She was not about to turn rat on Michael, or let him know that she could have saved her own ass by letting the Feds fry his. Some things had to remain private, even though Michael owed her for ‘exploring his options’ with two other women, who he kept nameless. Maybe it was nobility, maybe misplaced passion, or maybe true love. But that was then and this was---

Her thoughts and speculations were brought back to hard and immediate reality by a knock on the door. “Now,” an unfamiliar and very authoritative voice yelled out from behind the door in German.

“Bitte,” the soft-spoken appendum to it from behind the door which she recognized as Herman.

“That means ‘please’, Karen,” Tex whispered into Karen’s ear.

“The most dangerous word in any language,” Karen noted, assessing her abilities and options. “Ya’ll take care of yourself Lillie, ya hear?”

“Moseltov, Komrade,” Tex replied, head bowed, making his exit.

Being Jewish and Communist seemed to go hand in hand in Brooklyn, but the stories Karen heard at Camp X about Germany and Russia indicated that one was volatile, both were outright reckless. True, she was half Jewish by blood, and not really Christian or Jewish by temperament or belief. Spirituality was something you invented or acquired as you went along. Something to explain the cruelty in the world, or vindicate it. Maybe the truth was beyond spirituality. Perhaps God was just a guy, or gal, who wanted to give up the job of taking care of a few billion humans on earth and a brigade of goldbricking angels in Heaven. But one thing was certain---the five foot two giant standing in the doorway with a closed briefcase and an empty heart.

“Professor, come in,” Karen smiled alluringly.

“Herman. And you are---?” he politely inquired.

“--Glad to have the chance to discuss subjects of mutual interest,” Karen replied, with a wisdom directed into cleverness in the heat of the moment.

Herman nodded his head. The Aryan 6 and a half footers around him went about their own business, the boot heels revealing that it was a long distance away, and at least two floors down.

Karen breathed a sigh of relief, then the lights went low, then put the record on the victrola. Music with the theme of Eternal Life, and Death, in a slightly disharmonic chord with violins from another time, place and reality.

“The Death Pledge from Tristan Und Isolde,” Herman said, in English. “By Wagner. The most beautiful piece of music ever written, despite what Himler, Roosevelt and Cole Porter say.”

The disharmonic chords melted into the kind of tome that played in all keys at the same time, revealing all of the human emotions at once, melding into...

“Harmony, and the possibility of love in a world full of hate,” she heard coming out of her mouth, and heart.

Herman pulled out a chair at the head of the table, inviting Karen to sit. He bowed, she nodded, he moved to his chair at the opposite end of the table and uncovered a roast capon adorned with potatoes, onions and carrots. He served her a plate. She tasted it and smiled. He lit a candle in the middle of the table, its flame burning small but bright and hopeful, complimented by the aria of the Irish Princess Isolde pledging her love for forbidden love Tristan across the North Sea.

Maybe it was the candlelight. Maybe the Wagner. Maybe the warmth in Professor Herman’s eyes. Silence was all she could speak, or hear. Even when he made small talk about her family back in Brooklyn, his family in Bonn, and the spices in the capon.

Karen remembered sneaking into the New York Opera House, before the FIRST World War that would end all Wars, or end the world. Of all arias, cantatas and chorus verses orchestra pieces, Tristan and Isolde stayed in her heart. She heard it, ironically enough, when first with Michael. It was when he was Mikey from Brighton Beach, and she was whatever he wanted her to be from anywhere else. It now felt like yesterday, or it was a thousand yesterdays ago. It was like yesterday, or it was a thousand yesterdays ago. She recalled a concept from her patron author, Katzantakis. “If all women are the same woman to men, then all men are the same man to a woman,” she silently contemplated softly, then elevated the reasoning to a louder volume between her ears. “And if I understand the Soul or my enemy, I can understand his State Secrets, and the real reason why his country is making war on my---”

“Ich liebe Sie,” came out of Herman’s mouth.

To say “I love you” and use the formal tense seemed odd.

“Forgive me,” he interjected in English, “You are a trained scientist, not a whore.”

“We’re all whores,” Karen countered, “we all want something, and if the price is high enough, we’ll give it up for what we want.”

“Give it up? What is this? I studied three years at Harvard and one at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and I never hear this.”

“Too many institutes of technology, not enough...”

“Beers with the guys?”

“Nights with the gals,” came out like water out of a well-shaped colander. She moved in towards Herman, one careful step at a time. His face tightened. Karen stroked his arm, lightly then assuringly. A chill overtook Herman, then a strange horror inside his very being as he turned his head aside.

“Warm...I feel...” he related.

“Warmth? Feel this, please.” Karen pulled his head forward, edged her face in towards his quivering mouth, laid her lips gently on his.

“It’s in his kiss,” she recalled from Rayana Wilkinson, a Mulatto cellmate back in Jackson, Mississippi. “Ya wanna know what’s in a man’s mind, you look in his eyes. Ya know what’s in his heart, ya feel what’s in his lips, child.” Rayana saw herself as Karen’s mother, not her lover. When news came

out that Rayana had killed herself after being turned down for sex by a guard she had the hots for, it broke Karen's heart. The cover-up story about a killing after the legally sanctioned rape broke Comrade Lubitski's faith in justice as well. "It'd be in his kiss, child," Karen heard echoing in her heart as her eyes glanced at the locked briefcase that Herman took everywhere with him, including, so the dossier claimed, the can.

It was an enjoyable kiss, the point of no return approaching. Herman didn't seem like a bad man, just a man doing important things for bad people. Hitler loved animals, so the Camp X tour-book said. So how would you extract info from Old Adolph about how he'd conquer the world? "Be a bitch", Karen reluctantly thought to herself, silently, so her soul couldn't hear it.

CHAPTER 12

The details regarding a conversation that opened up dialogue which would not be written down in any report, even to Buck White began. Karen asked, "yes?" to the questions she never put into words. Herman said "maybe", wanting to say "yes" to each advance. Karen asked again, Herman said, "yes, alright, thank you" to each of the steps in the protocol of romance that developed each step of the way. As his body gave in to his heart's desires, his mind felt embarrassed. Maybe it was his putrid breath, the hideous scars on his torso left behind by the barn accident as a child, or the women he had been with who left him for reasons he would never tell anyone, even himself.

"Thank you," he kept saying again and again through post-passion grog, eyes closed shut.

"You are most welcomed," Karen kept responding as her right hand stoked the scarred flesh on his chest, her left taking pictures of the documents in the briefcase with the miniature camera put under her pillow by Michael, or Tex, or maybe even Buck White masquerading as the hotel housemaid with the fussy upper lip and chin. Either that, or superiorly bred Arian women really DID have stronger muscles than their American, French, and Slavic counterparts.

The key to the most secret of all secret scientific documents about the all-powerful doomsday machine was in Herman's left from pocket, easily accessed, and replaced. The camera had film enough for twenty photos, the required number at least twice that.

What the formulas meant was Greek to Karen, most of the formulaic symbols being in that language. "Maybe Nikos Katzantakis can translate it for me", she whispered into the carnation for the recording that would go back to Camp X. "But, no, I need to figure out the 'why' here. And the---"

"Something wrong, Liepshin?" Herman inquired, opening his eyes to see Karen in the nightgown, back to him, doing something very strange in the bathroom. He got up, walked towards her, and touched her on the back. A CRASH, then...

"Shit!" she screamed, the camera on the floor, hopefully still intact as her fingers frenetically struggled to reload the next roll of film.

"Something wrong?" he asked tenderly.

"A crystal doll, she muttered out, "It was my grandmother's, and I dropped it. I'll clean up the floor and---"

"I'll help you, Karen"

"No. I'll do it, please, Herman," she smiled back, hoping his vision would be fixed on her firm, exposed breasts rather than her quivering lips.

Herman seemed puzzled, his hands saying that his head was one step from figuring the whole thing out.

Karen grabbed onto his hands. "These hands are for science, not for collecting glass slivers off the floor." A kiss on the Professor's paws sealed his mind shut again, and his heart open.

"You go back to bed. I'll be back in a minute."

"Thirty seconds."

"Forty five."

"Sold. American!"

Herman went back to the bed, putting himself on top of it, like a king, but not before securing the briefcase shut with the key, inserting it back into his trouser pocket, and his trousers back on.

Karen returned to the holy altar of eros soon afterwards, the negligee over her shaking body. Half the data in place, another half to go, and a woken up virgin Herman who wouldn't want to sprout another oil well of semen until tomorrow night. White's schedule called for delivery of data in a matter of hours.

"An effective field agent always uses initiative," Karen remembered from the pep talks at Camp X. "He assesses his options, abilities and completes the Mission anyway he can."

What was good for the goose was good for the gander, or was it the goose that was male and the gander female? Karen could never get that straight. But there were points of common ground between herself and Herman, and common grudges. He was born to a working class family who couldn't get work during most of the years since the armistice with France. Like George Washington, he had an ego. The little known secret about Old George was that as the richest man in America, he pleaded with the British to get a commission as an officer in their army, not merely be head of the Colonial Militia. A weatherworn Canadian book on American history remembered from the corner of the prison library speculated that if Washington had been offered a post in the British Army as an officer in that army, he wouldn't have volunteered his services as General to the American rebels in 1774. Washington was an 'I am what I do' kind of guy, believing that what he had to offer HAD to be accepted by SOMEBODY. Maybe putting together Herman's experience in the States before the war---

"Herman, did you ever think about winning the Nobel Prize?" she asked.

"Hmmm," the reply, after tense silence.

“No, I mean you’re a brilliant scientist and a brilliant man, and I thought that...”

“...The world MUST allow me to create. It is my Calling.” The look in his eyes was pure determination, driven by primal fire of the soul. Like that of the busts of Beethoven that showed a man driven by a mission.

“Could you pursue your calling in the States, Herman?”

“Could you, Karen? You wanted to bring Democratic Socialism to America and they put you in jail for you trouble. Now you’re a woman with a cause, but without a country.”

Karen noted something in the next questions that WEREN’T asked. Firstly, Herman didn’t ask what her cause was. Maybe he cared too much about her as a lover, or too little about her as a person. Secondly, he stopped asking scientific questions of her. Maybe he lost interest in talking shop on their first day of ‘work’ together. Or maybe she really did know how to manipulate him into ceasing to ask about her embellished scientific background, skillfully fabricated by the top agents in Britain and Canada. Thirdly, the questions were going to be about Herman now. “It’s about getting them to talk about them, not to listen. In any case, Karen nuzzled in closer to Herman, putting the briefcase on the bed in front of them, discretely opening her crotch so the microphone inside could get a clear listen of the rest of the interview.

Karen prompted the question with a stroke of her fingers, those digits finding themselves on Herman’s buttons with a radar that gave her frightening confidence.

“I could have had a laboratory of my own in Boston, or even Pasadena just after the LAST war,” Herman confessed. “But everyone wanted Einstein instead. His theory of relativity become popular with the masses as comic book reading, and soon, everyone whose theories about physics don’t match Einstein’s are wrong. Did you know that Professor Albert used to need people to correct his arithmetic mistakes?”

“Yeah,” Karen recalled from the stories she read, and tall tales she had heard from Columbia University friends the cops had labeled ‘clients’ at her trial. “He was horrible with a checkbook, too”.

“And checkbooks is what modern science is all about, Karen. My work, or your work, doesn’t get done unless someone pays the bills. Someone has to buy the test-tubes, the chemicals, the Bunsen burners and the fusion splitting chambers...And the world needs what I have to offer. I can turn sunlight into food, silver into gold, uranium into plutonium! I can create a world where there is so much plenty there will be not need for war. And the only place where I can do this work that the world needs is here! I’m not going to say ‘no’ to a check from Hitler the housepainter, or even his drinking buddy Stalin. The world can put up with wars. It always has. But the world cannot survive without scientific advancement. And the kind that--!” He froze in mid rage.

“The kind that what?”

Herman looked at Karen. “The work comes first. Before me, my family, and even you.” He put his shirt on, took the briefcase, and made his way to the mirror to put on his tie, using only the mirror to get a glimpse of Karen’s face, wracked with frustration, and fear.

“We have much work to do today, Major Lubinska,” he stated with a tone that said ‘session ended, for a long time’. “You will be working under Professor Belker for the next two weeks.”

“I thought I was working for you, directly for you, Herman.”

“Your security clearance, and knowledge of the work.”

“What about my knowledge about Einstein, the man, and his work?”

“Put it in the notes. And by no means share it with anyone. Particularly Professor Olsen.”

“Your competitor and mine?” Karen surmized, accurately this time.

Karen was thankful to Michael for putting in the line about the scientific competition between Wolfgang Olsen and Herman in briefing notes that had to be destroyed after reading. Olsen had beat him to press on four major discoveries, then kept Herman from getting tenure in Berlin, Hamburg and even Dresden.

“What are you talking about, Major Karen?”

“Edison and Tesla, and it’s Professor Karen, with my own department of physics and political science if I have anything to say about it.”

“You’re working under Professor Belker, who works under me,” Herman affirmed as he pushed his tie firmly under the collar, reaching for his coat and hat.

“You’re Tesla, the one who discovered everything. Olsen is Edison, the moron scientist who knows marketing, Herman,” she pleaded.

“Ya.” Herman stopped, staring Karen directly in the eye through the mirror.

“You fire me, I get pissed off, and run to Olsen,” Karen dared to fire back as an assertion, and offering. “Maybe with some of those discoveries in your briefcase. We doctor them up so when Olsen tries them, they fail. Professor Olsen winds up scientifically embarrassed, using formulas and designs that WE know don’t work. And...”

“He ends up cleaning MY test tubes,” Herman mused with a vengeful smile well justified by a lifetime of rejection letters. “Or even better...”

“Olsen and his band of thieves clean toilets at a concentration camp somewhere,” Karen added, sharing Herman’s grudges for a moment or two. “While you and I...”

Herman pondered the possibilities. “Revolutionize the world together. From anywhere we want. Berlin, Moscow, or maybe even New York,” he said, seeing a whole film of the event behind his re-awakened eyes.

“As long as it’s below 23rd. Street, and not in the Bowery,” Karen appended to the script being written in Herman’s love-craving imagination. She contemplated the options if the screenplay went into production. Maybe selling her way back to the country that turned on her, then let her loose, would buy her way back home early, and on her own terms. She had gone after silver and found gold. But for the moment, it was about--

“I need to look into the briefcase. Make copies of what you have, alter it so that Olsen and his goons will be SURE to fail, fast. I’ll give you my notes, and my lists of friends in Moscow and Washington.”

“That you met under similar circumstances,” Herman threw back, possessed by a jealousy he never thought he’d have for a woman, or even a whore.

Karen kissed Herman on the cheek, with passion. “Sincerity, if I can fake that”, she remembered from a vaudevillian comic somewhere in the past, or was it John Steinbeck, or Katzantakis, or Michael?

Herman found purpose to his heart, and soul. The next question would say if the arrangement would work.

“I need the key.” Karen said.

“Certainly,” Herman replied, handing the purpose to his existence over to her. Something he had never done before.

CHAPTER 13

“So, Mildred, do you think she is serious?” Buck White asked his new Secretary at the decoding station. “She’s going to get Professor Hermann and his technology?”

“It seems so, Sir,” the East Indian born and very British-bred woman informed him as another bomb exploded outside. The ground shook, but only enough to shake the teacups, not the pot. But it was teatime in London and some customs had to be maintained, even though the world around those rituals was collapsing.

“I have to hand it to you Brits,” White conceded. “London Bridges Falling down may be a reality, but you still have your kids singing it in the playgrounds.”

“Yes, Sir,” Mildred acknowledged. “We do our best Sir.”

“And a splendid job it is, Mildred. Makes me re-think the American Revolution, Slavery and all those other accidents of history where we came up on top and you got second helpings.”

“Are you saying that you should have stayed the course with us in 1776, Sir?”

“Hell no. We needed to be free of you, and you needed to be free of us.”

“Quite,” Mildred replied. “I suppose.”

White was new to the British Intelligence Service, and British life. Canada had a touch of England in it, but it sort of stopped at the Union Jack over the vast pine forests. The Brits had big financial aspirations on both sides of the pond, the tenacity of a mule, and an understatement to everything, both good and bad. But there was something about the Island that stood in the forefront of the Nazi invasion that White found quite vile to his West Texas upbringing. “Everything here is so small,” he noted when picking up a cup of tea. “This is a thimble with a handle.”

“We’re rationing, Sir,” Mildred commented, as she wrote down the rest of Operative Michael Wilson’s message. “We have to make do with what we have.”

“Well in Texas, if we don’t have it, we get it.” He looked at his watch, ticking away towards a deadline only he, Churchill and Wild Bill Donovan knew about. “And I need that message translated in my language, pronto, comprende?”

“We’re working as fast as we can. Our code is...”

“...Delivering me crap!” he commented reading the first translation. “What the hell is Karen doing over there? She has orders to get information, not bring in defectors, on terms they dictate.”

A read of the whole work said it all. White face turned beet red.

“It appears that she may be bringing in a prisoner, Sir.”

“Yes,” White nodded. “Quite. A prisoner who thinks he’s a partner. We may be able to use this Nazi in our own War..”

“The War against Hitler, I trust, Sir.”

“The War the End all wars,” White noted with a charming Texas smile. “You do good work there, Mildred.”

“We do our best, Sir.” She moved onto the next message, an outgoing one this time, delivered in the German code to an operative somewhere in France. White glanced at the original translation.

“Russian troop build up in Eastern Poland, with plans to attack the Germans on the Eastern Front, on April 1 at 2 AM. Four Divisions in the North, and two in the South.”

“This true?” White asked.

Mildred smiled, looking downward. “You Yanks use your muscles to fight your way out of a tight situation. Or you buy a scientist or two, a country, or an international industry. We have to use other means at our disposal. Which are, for the moment, at your disposal.”

“Assuming that Roosevelt won’t keep sitting on the fence, Mildred?”

“Lying to the Germans is our job, lying to your own government is yours....Sir.”

CHAPTER 14

The port of Reuchfort barely made the map. Located on the rocky Danish coast, it might as well have been on the Southern Coast of Newfoundland. No roads in from inland, except for those made by the traveler en route. But there was one landmark which stood out very distinctly, even against the dark, moonless night.

“Thor’s Ferry” Hermann Neilson deciphered from the Nordic Runes on the ancient stone jutting out of the mini-peninsula barely wide enough to take a team of mules.

“...To the Underworld”, Wilhelm noted as he scraped away the seaweed just above the water. “Are you sure you want to go through with this, Professor?” Wilhelm asked.

“Yes, he does,” Karen interjected, soothing the doubts of her ‘new man’ with a stroke on his cheek, a caress of his shaking body. “My bosses will take care of him.”

“Ya, like they took care of you!” Wilhelm laughed.

It was a sadistic laugh, but also a sad one. Hermann knew the world from the top, traveling first class all the way. He now wore the rags of a laborer over his suit, his briefcase and supplemental valises containing the scientific data that would buy him a new life, in a new country. But which country, and what kind of life? Each time Hermann imagined another worse-case scenario, Wilhelm would belt out another ‘ho, ho’, pulling the boat out of the reeds that would take him to...

“Don’t listen to him!” Karen interjected. “America’s a hard country, but it’s honest.”

“Spoken like a true Stalinist, Komrade,” Wilhelm interjected. He pulled the rowboat up, grabbed the Professor’s bags, and tossed them on board. “Coming, Comrade Professor Hermann?” he mused as the boat started to float away with the tide, the line to it seemingly lost.

Karen gasped in disbelief. This was not in the plan A devised by her; plan B as modified by Michael or anything that White could have designed. To let such valuable data go because of a rope that broke, so coincidentally.

“Bring that boat back! Now!” Professor Hermann Neilson ordered.

“I can, Herr Professor. But the submarine waiting for you, and the tide. As your humble servant, one of the little people, I can only...”

“Please! Don’t let my papers go without me. Please!” Neilson pleaded from the shore.

Wilhelm smiled. “Of course.” He pulled another rope out of the marsh, an underwater lifeline, leading to the starboard side of the boat. With one assertive tug, the mini-craft cut the icy-cold waters like a knife, landing securely at Thor’s Stone.

Wilhelm bowed, offering the Professor an easy walk onboard.

“Danke” he said, head held high, heart racing to beat the clock that was ticking down, fast.

Once on board Hermann extended his hand out to Karen. But then note from Wilhelm which said...“Karen. There is a seat next to me, with your name on it.”

Karen glanced at the seat on the boat, Hermann pulling up his coat, revealing a box of chocolates and a red rose.

“I’ll be on the next one. Promise.” Karen said, throwing him a sincere kiss, which was received, and believed.

The rowboat disappeared into an incoming fog. Karen stood alone on the shore. She wished she didn’t have a flashlight. Maybe that way she would not have been able to see read the note, and the one who wrote the message, edging in from the woods behind her like a cold shadow on an already dark night.

“So, Michael. Is this what’s going to happen to me, too?” she noted.

“Professor Hermann will be treated humanely,” her ‘boss’ assured her in a voice that was not very assuring.

“We can get more information from him by treating him respectfully, and honorably,” Karen noted. “Protective Custody doesn’t protect anyone from anything. And holding him in that ‘place’ between us and them that doesn’t exist for either side until you’re sure whose side he’s on...”

Michael took out a cigarette, lighting one for himself, then one for Karen.

“I don’t smoke unless it’s with a client,” Karen asserted.

“Do I have to be a client, to get what I, we, ah, you know...”

“You have to tell me the truth, Michael!”

“No one in this War knows the real truth, Karen. We know what we have to know to stay alive, and keep those of us we care about alive.”

“And who do you care about, Michael?” The words slurred out of her mouth before she could think them, or anticipate their consequences. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that.”

“Yes, you did.”

“So you’ll tell me where your heart is in all of this?” Karen asserted.

Michael hesitated. “I owe you at least that.”

Wilson embraced his beloved lower-rank operative. He allowed himself to feel what she was this time. He allowed himself to feel the Life Energy from her gut, connecting to his heart. From the chi point below his navel up to his conflict-ridden brain, he felt the transformation a woman can give a man. A visit to places and Universes beyond Berlin, Moscow, Washington, or even Brooklyn. The magical third person had emerged between them, singing rhapsodies to both of them in their own individual languages.

“Wow,” she exhaled from quivering lips. “What just happened here?”

“I don’t know. Do you?”

“I’d like to. But what about tomorrow?” she asked.

Michael hesitated, gazed into the calendar behind his eyes he shared with no one, not even himself, and sung, “Tomorrow belongs, tomorrow belongs, to me.”

The sight of her most trusted contact, and perhaps friend, bicycling off into the thick woods singing the words to the Hitler Youth Movement hardly uplifted Karen’s spirits. But there was something grand about it all. Karen had graduated three steps higher on her way from schlep to Master something. The only question---Master of what, or who?

CHAPTER 15

At the Polytechnic Institute the next day it was business as usual. Wilhelm made sure Karen was escorted to her desk by noon, and that dead silence would be her greeting. She opened the door, noted the empty desks around her, and the newspaper on her chair. “Professor Hermann Neilson found dead” the headlines read, a photo of a mutilated body next to the story.

“Wilhelm picked a good looking corpse,” she commented under her breath. “He looks better dead than alive. Maybe I’ll look better dead. Besides, better dead than Red, or at least that’s what I read in...”

The rest of the article took an unexpected spin. The documents Hermann was trying to smuggle were recovered, in a brilliant heroic act against Allied Commandos who tried to kidnap the Professor and his documents, and the hero in question was---

“Me?” Karen said. “I eh---“

“---Made sure that the Fatherland and Mother Russia would be safe for generations to come,” came from somewhere behind her.

She turned around. The sterile walls were packed with German and Russian scientists cheering her on. For such acts of heroism! Going fist to cuffs with five armed Commandos, fleeing the woods, dodging machine gun fire, and even when captured, refusing to give up any of the Reich or Mother Russia’s secrets when threatened with rape. Another brilliant escape, to bring Hermann’s documents back

home, securely locked inside her own desk. Indeed, Wilhelm's network of moles had underground connections far deeper than the Gestapo or the British Secret Service, with a mail delivery system twice as fast.

Only Karen knew that the documents returned were altered to be sure that Hermann's brilliance would backfire on anyone who would try to use it. At least she hoped that was the case. And at least she hoped that the body in the newspaper article was from someone who was already dead, not picked for an early execution for the event, no matter how dangerous the unnamed prisoner was to the Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes. If indeed Hermann Nielson was under protective custody on the other side of the Great Waters, it was one of those 'after the war' events that you could tell your grandchildren, and maybe the journalists, or the Criminal Prosecution judges. She remembered another Camp X maxim. "All the War's a stage, and all the people actors."

Clearly Karen Lubinska had been graduated to another act in this War Drama, which comically, she seemed to enjoy. All that power, finally. And the realization that powerful did not always mean popular. The story about the dis-encharmed American Bolshevik who helped the Nazis keep their scientific secrets would keep her out of polite AND impolite societies in America for a long time after the War, assuming that there WOULD be an America after the War. Such a thought was pondered, but never spoken. A world without America...

The hand of fate whacked her on the shoulder, a light touch that felt like a steel hammer and thousand-ton sickle. "Karen, this came for you," Michael whispered amidst the Heil Karen's going around the room from Bolshevik and Nazi alive.

The engraving was distinctive, and demonic. The offer could not be refused.

"He wants to see you," Michael whispered. "Alone."

The table at the café now belonged to Karen, as did the attention of every waiter, and bold waitress as she shared another cocoa and struddle with Michael, both still considered enlightened Americans because they had officially disowned the 'weakling, Jewish-controlled' country of their birth in the German Press. The SS assigned to watch Karen were now re-assigned to protecting her person, and her privacy.

The dossier of the mark was carefully constructed, from British Intelligence. "He likes it hard, dirty, and he enjoys it when you piss and shit on him," Michael informed her in a muted tone. "And you have to say you love his art, until he finally shows it to you."

"That's interesting, Michael, but what I see is the eyes. Something happened in '36. He looks lost in all the photographs after that time. Kind of possessed."

"You know 'the housepainter' better than any of the psychiatrists do," Michael noted. "You really think you know Hitler from the inside?"

"I know that if you tell an aspiring artist, driven by passion that he can't get into art school because he's not in the 'in club', that he's going to form his own club and club EVERYone down." She put her coffee down. "When do I have dinner with him?"

"Tonight."

"Where?"

"You'll find out."

“And you want me to kill him.”

“Ending this War isn’t as simple as that. We need information.”

“Who needs information?”

“Us. The Good Guys, Karen!”

The uniformed SS guards by the lamppost and the undercover agent reading the newspaper near the dumpster took notice. Karen smirked, smiled, tensed up, and kissed Michael, on the cheek.

“What was that for?” he asked.

“We’re having a lover’s quarrel. Normal. After all, we’re the perfect couple for when the Third Reich takes over the American homeland. We both distrust Stalin, and we both hate the country that won’t let us go home again. Tomorrow belongs to...us.” The words led to lyrics, then song, Karen starting a table by table avalanche of the optimistic anthem that compelled so many children to run from skipping to goose-stepping.

The marching tune sung to the rhythm of a waltz was indeed contagious, causing even Michael to sway his head to and fro.

“Michael,” Karen interjected under the deafening laughter of the music. “What do you want me to do about, with, or to, the ‘Housepainter’?”

From Michael, no answer. Then again, all Karen needed was the time, place and the assignment. All would be delivered in due course. After all, the good guys always win in the movies. Even in a town where Nazi planes with bombs destined for London go over your head day and night, and where the stench of burning flesh on the outskirts of town could hardly be rendering plants for dogs, cats or cattle. Then there was the Jewish issue. Stalin persecuted everyone equally, but Hitler persecuted Jews, generally leaving everyone else except gypsies and homosexuals alone. One ‘unit’ of cruelty was the allotted fate of every Russian, but ten units awaited every Jew. Was this enough justification to wage a war at any cost against the Reich, and only the Reich? Or was it the selective compassion issue again. Was it Karen’s remembering the stories from his father about the Programs in Poland against the Jews from the Czar and the Kaiser?

The irony struck her, hard and fast as the swaying led to swinging, then drinking. “Tomorrow belongs to them,” she thought. “Unless this nice half-Jewish girl I see in the faded mirror every morning can give Old Adolf a real good talking to tonight.”

Chapter 16

Maxim number 356 at Camp X was that there was scuttlebutt, and fact. Facts said that Hitler was a vegetarian who liked children and loved dogs. Scuttlebutt was that he was as sterile as a cold carrot stick and that his affection for canines involved personal experiments in crossbreeding. Strategy was to make the German people believe the scuttlebutt. Such was the mandate of a new branch of British Intelligence whose mission it was to get the RIGHT dirt on Old Adolf, blow it up in cartoon, and distribute it to every soldier in the German Army. The photos of Hitler masturbating in Lederhosen were an obvious forgery, mildly effective on ardent Christian Ukrainians debating the issue of whether to side with the Nazis or the Bolsheviks. But even mis-information had to come from some real information. So Karen told herself as she was led into the dinner chamber where the most eligible bachelor in Europe, and to some the most handsome, awaited her presence at the dining table.

Michael and Wilhelm escorted her through the third door in the unnamed Bavarian Castle retreat. Then Michael was asked to leave. Then by the fifth door, Wilhelm was dismissed. The door shut closed behind her, and...nothing. Except for the walls, faces and images on them screaming out passion, anger, frustration, and unappreciated tenderness. The brushstrokes were hard, the colors expressive. Nothing subtle about them, the eyes of the birds, wolves, and people revealing exactly what were in their hearts, and minds.

“You like them?” a voice rang out from behind in a harsh voice in German that sounded ominously familiar, fresh paint on his hands.

A turn, a look, and a shocked smile revealed the Housepainter himself, wearing a wide-lapelled flannel gray suit, a tie and shoes, rather than hip boots. Except for the fudge-stop mustache, he could have been Anyman America. All except for the eyes that channeled something humanity had not experienced, yet, collectively, had to in order to mature into adulthood.

“Sit, please,” he beckoned in German, in a human voice driven by the Devil’s agenda.

The table was set for two, three plates of vegetables prepared to suit a king, and queen. The china was a simple pattern, as was probably the objective of her host.

“Thank you for coming,” Karen thought she heard in German as the Master of the Master Race served her broccoli, beans, and cauliflower, with a side of sauerkraut. The rest was muddled, as if the Furher’s tongue was possessed by a demon speaking a strange language. Maybe Karen should have taken the German lessons at Camp X more seriously, or maybe she should have put the tape recorder into her vaginal pocket. Or maybe it was already in there and she didn’t even feel it anymore. Being around the most famous conduit of Evil did that to people, making them forget their own agenda and purpose.

One thought occurred, though, very clearly. “If we can’t figure out what makes this man tick, we’ll have men like this around for the rest of history,” Karen realized, almost to the point of mouthing it.

But this meeting was about gestures, not politics. Adolf pointed to the paintings on the wall, signed “AH”. The more timid the signature, the more she praised the work, the more he showed, and the more he revealed of himself.

“A boy in a man’s world,” the notepad in her mind scribbled down. “Someone who has no idea about what is going on around him,” point number two. “And someone with a powerful axe to grind against Jews, Communists and anyone who would stand in the way of a Wagnerian Paradise where German Nationalism gets to grow unchallenged.”

The phonograph churned out Wagner’s Lohengrin, Karen caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror. Indeed, she looked the part. Healthy, strong, blonde, and blue-eyed. Rugged individualism in the tradition of Nordic Ancestors on her Irish mother’s side, or maybe even her Polish Father’s. It was, after all, the Vikings who probably discovered America, and those ‘savages’ in their long ships made Dublin the most productive trading port of its time. Wagner breathed fire into the Irish spirit, before the Roman Church sterilized it. And the ideal of attaining all the magnificence you can---wasn’t this the American Agenda, anyway? To fight a Holy War against oppression of the Spirit, or the small-mindedness of a world that wanted to keep a conquered country ‘in its place’ after 1918. To die with a sword in your hand, pride in your heart, and conviction for a purpose that---

The room felt empty, sterile, and blank. Karen froze, noticing that the table knife in her hand was being held like a dagger. Noting that the blade was far sharper than she envisioned. And that on her wrist was a presence, which was both cold and hot, hard and soft, kind and cruel.

“Come,” he said in a voice that echoed in Karen’s head, leading her to a large sofa. The tandem tone was part angel and part demon, luring her in.

A touch led to a push, then a shove, then she found herself standing up, her knee on Adolf’s groin.

“Shit on me,” he pleaded. “Piss on me! Then vomit onto my chest!” he commanded.

Karen was never more grateful for a fiber-enriched meal, and enough terror to let it go. Excrement from her anal cavity poured down upon the Madman who felt purged, golden showers from her vaginal orifice baptizing him for some kind of ritual that only he was able to understand. As for the vomit, it was easy, once the sickliness of the leader of the Master Race lay in front of her. Indeed, if he did have a third leg, it was no more than a small carrot, and he was the one who wanted to stroke it.

Now was the time, and now was the place. Ask the masturbating baby, purged of his guilt; anything and he’d answer. But what to ask, and how? So much information that the Allied Command needed to know about. Plans to invade England, the secret biological and chemical weapons that could be

loaded onto V2 rockets to blow over New York, the rumored spy rings in Mexico ready to infiltrate the highest level of American Government at anytime. But only one word slurred out of Karen's mouth.

"Joseph Stalin."

"A bitch and a whore," she recognized from his mouth. "A Jewish Clown."

The rest of the comments were hardly complimentary to an Ally in the Non-Aggression Pact, but one phrase was clear. "June 25, 3 AM," a vengeful look in Adolf's eye.

A chill went through Karen. In less than a week, something big was going to happen. A surprise attack against Stalin? Was Hitler stupid as well as crazy? Or maybe Germany COULD be the first country in that would invade Russia in the Spring and finish the job by the falling of the autumn leaves. It made sense, yet everyone kept denying it. And perhaps it would be a good thing for the world as well. Russia and America both working together to fight Fascism. And when they shook hands at Berlin after it was over, Capitalist and Communist Regimes would exchange ideals, electing to keep the ones that were humane. Carl Marx and Groucho Marx both working together. "Each giving according to his abilities, taking according to his needs, with preservation of the pursuit of happiness for all."

Of course, there would have to be a War to fight first, and warning given to Stalin, as well as Churchill. Small details, unless---

Karen felt her head fall to the ground, hitting the floor, hard. The rest was a blur. A gravelly voice whispering a mixture of insults and compliments to her. A steel-cold hand on her sweat-soaked torso. A carrot that had grown to the size of a cucumber emitting dense fluid into her----

Chapter 17

The nightmare lasted three days, or was it three minutes? Karen was unable to tell, surrounded by Nurses in long faces and Doctors in longer lab coats. The accommodations were plush, to say the least, the blue sheets matching the black and blue bruises on her arms, legs and groin. Private room, private bath, and a private entrance, well guarded by SS Troopers.

"Where am I? What...?"

Then, a familiar face under a nurse's cap.

"Wilhelm, what are you?" Karen slurred through a whisper.

"Shhhh" he said to her with a hand adorned with just enough nail polish to make the disguise convincing. "I can take her outside for a walk, Herr Doctor?" he asked in a high-pitched voice to the physician in charge.

"Five minutes," the reply.

"Danke," Karen's answer.

"You must keep your strength up," the Doctor smiled back.

But Wilhelm wasn't smiling, and after wheeling Karen out the left door, he took a sharp right, throwing her into a body bag, then the trunk of a car.

The how's and where's grew more blurry with each bump as the road below became more pothole than path to escape. But to where? Each time the vehicle slowed down, another soldier would bark out orders, another pounding on Karen's badly bruised bones and another legitimate reason to scream out in

pain, and terror . Five more checkpoints, then....All four wheels of the car screeched to a halt. Two doors opening and slamming shut. Three gunshots, one fallen body, maybe two. Clicks on the trunk lock, a pair of hands, larger than Wilhelm's, with a hard grip, grabbing onto the corpse inside.

Karen found herself praying, to anyone who would listen. Jesus, Buddha, Allah, and even the ghost of Lenin got heartfelt offers of her life, and virginity in exchange for something to go right. Her vitality in exchange for being 'safe', a pact made only by ignorant slaves to the most sadistic Demon.

Outside the black space she still called her own, shovels dug deeper into the earth. A glance through the sac wall revealed shadows of men with large trench coats and helmets, their faces hidden. Maybe one of them would be Tex. Maybe even Buck White. But when the sac was slit open with a bayonette, Karen kept her eyes closed.

"Blinking," Michael whispered behind her. "They always find out that you're alive when you blink."

Michael embraced Karen. She collapsed into his arms, crying. For the first time since the walls on the Mississippi Prison slammed shut on her back in '34, she was crying.

"It's alright. We'll get you out of here. We got stopped by the Gestapo, Comrade," Michael explained, his feet drenched in a pool of German blood.

"So you know...I think he called it 'Barbarosa...The surprise attack on the Russians?" Karen said.

"So do your doctors and nurses," Wilhelm blasted back, taking the uniforms off the slain Sear gent and Corporal, hoping they would fit himself and Michael. "You were blabbing about that and the rest of your night with the Fuhrer for four days."

"Four days?"

"They were keeping you alive for amusement, I suppose. But if it were up to me, I would have shot you before you told those bastards anything," Wilhelm related.

"Bastards? The Germans?" Karen challenged.

"The Nazis. They kill my son for accidentally falling in love with a Jewish girl, I destroy their country. A fair bargain."

"I didn't even know you had a---"

"---We have to keep moving. Inform the Russians that their German allies are going to unleash everything they have in three days." Wilhelm turned to Michael.

"You told Churchill?"

"And Roosevelt," Michael's reply as he tried on the Corporal's coat, a size too big, the hat three sizes too small.

"And will do what?" Wilhelm challenged.

"Contact Stalin, I suppose. I tried to get a message through to the Soviet High Command, but---"

"The Russians are that way," Wilhelm intuited, pointing to the woods. "South around the Panzer division headquarters, then East."

"No!" Michael asserted. "Straight East, Comrades. We have no time to lose."

CHAPTER 18

Michael wore the captured Sergeant's uniform but Corporal Wilhelm gave the orders at each checkpoint. That was until the truck broke down and it seemed a better idea to sneak around the German troop build ups rather than talk one's way through them. And, besides, Karen was a wanted woman, useful to her country only if she could get to the Russian High Command. She moved painfully through the woods, and but she was grateful to be alive, and not menstruating drips of blood for the bloodhounds to follow.

Blue-blood Boston-born Michael Wilson turned out to be a better wilderness guide than even Wilhelm suspected. "You have an instinct for sneaking around in the woods and not being noticed, Comrade."

"I was a boy scout before I became a Communist," Michael related, shhing them down as he heard another German troop detachment move into position, offloading a howitzer cannon off a camouflaged truck.

"Fifty millimeter guns," Wilhelm noted.

"We'd better backtrack and circle around them," Michael advised.

"We've been doing circles for days!" Wilhelm asserted. "The closest distance between two points is a circle?"

"It might be...I think it is..." Karen interjected, coming up from behind, dragging one nearly broken leg with a badly sprained one. "You two go on ahead. Please."

"We can't." Michael asserted.

"Why not?" Wilhelm countered.

"Because she knows more than she thinks she does."

"And she told us what she knows."

“She hasn’t even told herself what she knows, Wilhelm. Under hypnosis, or truth serum, she’ll tell things she doesn’t even remember herself.”

“So you take out your watch, Comrade Scientist, and make her tell me what she knows, I get to Stalin, and you get her home.”

“Or shoot me, dead.” Karen slurred out. “He raped me.”

“Hitler raped the world, American lady. What makes you so special?”

“She’s special because she’s with me!” Michael asserted, holding a gun to Wilhelm’s head. “Like your son was special to you.”

“This I understand,” Wilhelm acknowledged.

Michael lowered his gun, assessed the troop movements around him, then checked his notes. “There’s a river this way, a mile.”

“Two kilometers, yes.” Wilhelm confirmed.

“Can you swim, Karen?”

“She’ll have to,” Wilhelm asserted.

Karen nodded ‘yes’, knowing the answer would undoubtedly be ‘no’.

CHAPTER 19

It was a feeling beyond tired, worn out, or even defeated. “Why keep going?” Karen kept asking herself as her legs dragged behind her body, weighing ten pounds more with each mile of trudging through the thistlebrush in an ever-darker forest which now had no trail between the trees as the Polish hill became a mountain. “Because you have to,” came from her gut, a place in it she never quite felt before. “Because you have to keep going” it echoed again and again.

“How much further?” she asked Michael as the pea-soup morning fog became a thick wall of white.

Her lover-turned-Savior-Scout stopped, listened, then let the wind speak the direction to him. “North. Another three hundred yards,” he intuited from the sound of the gently-flowing river ahead.

“Four hundred and fifty yards,” Wilhelm asserted, appearing from the other side of the dense fog, listening to the soles of his feet honed into the vibrations of the earth. “Four hundred and fifty miles if there is another German patrol ‘on maneuvers’.”

“I haven’t gotten us caught yet, Wilhelm,” Michael asserted.

“Yes. And that’s what scares me most,” the calm comeback. Wilhelm stopped, lit up a cigarette and sang the Socialist Internationale.

“Shut up!” Michael grunted in a loud whisper.

“Why, Comrade? It’s a joyous song. It will ‘inspire’ the Nazis into joining us, and defecting to the People’s Army on the other side of the river.”

As Wilhelm escalated the timber and tempo of the tune that Michael and Karen had danced to back in 1917, footsteps came out of the woods. Boots. Men with guns, poised and aimed at the SS Corporal and Sergeant escorting a renegade whore.

“Halt!” their leader commanded.

Michael froze, his lips locked in a quiver of terror.

“We have a gift from the Mayor! Wilhelm boasted, showing off his prize bitch, ripping off her blouse. “She’s not a virgin but if we order her to, she will be anything we want her to be.”

Wilhelm’s demonic laugh was contagious. The large shadows approached, laid down their guns and sat down, their leader keeping his distance, their uniforms non-descriptly gray.

Karen held on to Michael for dear life as the neutral gray turned to German green. Her terror inspired courage to erupt in him like a latent volcano. “They won’t harm you, Karen. I promise.”

“No,” their leader repeated, in English. “We just want to ask you some questions, Frau Lubinska.” He nodded.

The patrol’s guns were aimed at Wilhelm’s head. “As I suspected,” he said calmly.

“As what?” Karen asked. “What’s going on, Michael?”

The leader, a Captain in a Sergeant’s trenchcoat, approached Michael and handed him an envelope. “Your papers, as you requested.”

“Papers with pictures of Presidents on them?” Wilhelm interjected as he saw Karen taken away into a nearby truck, gently led by hand that could break her arm if she chose to resist.

“Michael. What’s going on?”

“He made a deal,” Wilhelm said, his hands up, resigned to the fate that he knew would come one day or another.

“A deal to get you back home, and to save your life!” Michael screamed out. “And the lives of many others!”

“Your family,” Wilhelm surmized.

“Half of whom died in the Ukraine by STALIN’S hand in 1931!” Michael asserted. “If Roosevelt is too cowardly to fight Stalin, at least Hitler will.”

“And when the Nazis take over Europe, you Americans will negotiate for trading contracts.”

“Quiet!” the insignia-less German leader commanded.

“Yes, Karen!” Wilhelm whispered to Karen. “Stay quiet. Tell them nothing, Comrade! Tell them NOTHING about the plan to invade the Russian lines on June 25th.”

“Now four days from now,” Karen slurred out, remembering that this June 21st had more daylight in it than she ever experienced, and she was never more in the dark.

Shots rang out, the fragrant early morning fog replaced by gun smoke in barely ten seconds.

Wilhelm hit the dirt, the German ‘visitors’ behind him absorbing bullets flying out of the woods. Michael ducked for cover between two fallen trees.

Karen could only hear her breath, going in and out of her body which she hoped was still alive. Then, a grab from behind. A grubby pair of hands, tugging her away, as another put a gag over her mouth.

“This way, bitch!” the man muttered in English thickened by a Slavic accent.

It was an offer that couldn’t be refused, taking Karen away from a thicket of woods racked with machine-gun fire, onto the back of a horse that galloped away.

“Tex?” She asked the rider, intuiting that maybe it was the Cavalry that came to save the day.

The rider grunted something in a gravelly voice with a tone that said ‘no’ to every reasonable or hopeful question she could possibly ask.

CHAPTER 20

A warm June morning never felt so cold, or foreign. Though the sun shined above, and the sky was a deep blue, and the birds chirped away, it was anything but peaceful and the slumber-sleep after the rescue didn’t last long. Whatever wasn’t moving was in the process of being moved. “Where? Where is everyone going?” she asked in English, German and Russian.

“Somewhere else, Comrade,” replied a Soviet soldier carrying a stretcher grunted out. It was a high pitched voice, from a strong person of some kind in an oversized coat.

The avian symphony was interrupted by mortar fire to the right, left, and what seemed to be the ‘rear’.

“Who’s in charge?” Karen asked, noting the company of Russian soldiers in random, and disorganized, retreat. Burdened by uncertainty, and wounded.

“Who’s in charge?” she screamed out as tried to get herself up.

“Whoever wants to be, or dares to be,” a high-pitched voice said from behind an over-sized coat. The insignia on the coat was artillery, but the soldier was now head of the paramedical team, evacuating wounded onto horse-drawn wagons, placing detached arms and legs left behind in the mud.

Karen tried to get up again but this time it was her swollen left leg that said ‘no’.

“You have two legs, get up and help. Or do you intend to fight the Germans on your back for the rest of the War,” the soldier blasted out from the side of her mouth. Her face was young, her eyes hard.

“Who are you?” Karen asked.

“Whoever I want to be, I suppose. But at least I didn’t give myself to any man.” Two large men approached her with more wounded. She nodded yes to one, a regretful ‘no’ to the other. A revolver was taken out, loaded, a gun pointed to a 17 year old lad’s head.

The boy opened his eyes, the man with the gun nodding.

A prayer came from the boy’s mouth, an Amen and...BLAST.

“What are you doing?” Karen screamed.

“I let him pray first. That was more than the Commander in Charge did before he was killed, thank God.”

“He was still alive.”

“And now he’s dead. And if you want to stay alive, you’ll keep up with the rest of us, or I’ll have to shoot you. I won’t endanger the lives of my Comrades because a whore decides to tell the Germans where we are.”

“I don’t know where we are!” Karen screamed out.

“That makes two of us,” the woman admitted. “But if you tell anyone else here that, I’ll have to shoot you.” The leader of the withdrawal sat down, took a breath and looked up to the sky.

“You speak good English,” Karen said, offering her a piece of dried beef from the bottom of her pocket. “You don’t look like you belong here.”

“None of us belong here.”

“My name is Karen.” She extended her hand.

“No calluses, Karen. And nail polish.”

“In the line of duty,” she commented in English. “A long story. Classified, I think.” She felt her head. “What day is this?”

“June 21.”

“But the Housekeeper said he’d attack on June 25th, not...” Karen stopped herself, the Commandress eyeing her with suspicion.

“You know more than an average whore,” she noted.

“I’m not an average whore!” Karen shot back.

“I know. You belong to the mole.”

“Who?”

The Commandress searched through Karen’s clothes, motioning to the rear. Standing on one good leg, hoping the other would not have to be put into the pile of lost ones that would some-day become food, Wilhelm seemed to know more about anyone else, so he found himself in charge. The Russian Commandress let him do so, with her own people aiming their guns at his back. “Yes,” she said of the deformed, hunchbacked German who was anything but an advertisement for Aryan racial purity. “The mole.”

“Wilhelm?” Karen asked, noting that his Russian was perfect, maybe too perfect.

“Basili, here,” the Commandress noted. “Dead, if he tries to stick his prick into any of MY girls.”

A rider galloped in, a Cossack mounted on a white steed, a string of draft horses and an Arabian mare behind him.

“Horses?” Karen exclaimed, remembering happy times on her Uncle farm upstate.

“Portable transportation, or food. Just like you.”

Karen heard about cannibalism during the Ukrainian Holocaust of the 30s, but always considered them Ultra-right Wing propaganda fabricated by the FBI to make Democratic Socialists turn on their Communist friends, and lovers. Like the rumors that Stalin ate the livers of his political enemies for breakfast, their hearts for lunch, and their testicles for dinner. The speculation led to another question as the nameless Commandress gathered weapons from the wounded, dead and dying, and loaded them onto the horses.

“Where’s Comrade Stalin?” Karen asked.

“Rumor is that he is having a nervous breakdown somewhere.”

“That can’t be true.”

“The Colonel who told me that is still alive, so it must be.”

Conversation ended, even with Wilhelm. He turned around, joining the group of soldiers who elected to fight on as a unit rather than on their own. His rear was well protected, as was Karen’s. Whoever was in charge of this newly-structured Army deemed it necessary that Karen and Wilhelm stay alive, and that they talk to no one, especially each other.

CHAPTER 21

“So, where is she?” Buck White asked the matron who was now his most vital link to the Mission.

“We seem to have lost contact with her, Sir,” Mildred replied as she adjusted the wires on the back of the radio. Nothing in her eyes, face or mannerisms said anything except ‘procedural’. “I checked all the frequencies, and there is no reply from any of our contacts, or yours.”

“Then check harder!” he barked.

“I am,” the dispassionate reply. “It seems as if the Germans are overrunning all positions on the Russian front. Terribly messy business for the Reds, and anyone else in the way of the Nazi offensive.”

“Terribly messy business!” Buck challenged. “Don’t you Brits get pissed off at ANYthing!”

“All the time, but we have the good sense not to show it.”

“Then how in hell does anyone know that anything is wrong?”

Mildred pondered the issue. “I don’t quite know that. But we do. We assess, collect, and formulate a plan, then get on with it. Anger achieves nothing---“

“---Except getting your ass off the ground and giving your brain box moving ahead at full gallop. NO one gets nothin’s done unless they get pissed off first!”

“And then?”

“You assess, collect, formulate and get on with it, Mildred.”

“And we getting on with it, Sir?”

Buck’s volcano simmered down to a mild boil. “Quite,” his reply, calmly delivered, another agenda on his face clearly evident, even to Mildred.

“You have special feelings for this Socialist slut?”

“She’s a Commie Whore,” Buck’s reply.

“Yours, Sir?” Perhaps Mildred had overstepped the line, but she had to ask.

“I don’t get involved with my agents,” he noted, hiding the fear inside his tight throat.

“Yes, Sir. Of course,” Mildred answered.

Another radio, another range of frequencies and another round of static yielded one conclusion. “She’s fucked, or she’s fucked up,” Buck thought. Either one meant that Karen was dead, or soon would be.

CHAPTER 22

Good fortune guided the path of the retreat through a horse farm, maybe Polish, maybe Russian, or maybe Lithuanian. Whatever flags or other cultural marks of national identity that had existed prior to May 21 were blown away, burned or taken by those running for their lives.

The “Division” was now mounted, or atop wagons that could be used when needed, jettisoned at any time necessary, or used for firewood.

The idea of fighting German tanks with horses was a romantic notion to the Cossack. Thirty years experienced in the saddle, barely thirty two years old, Corporal Dmitrowich had no other idea of how to view the world. He was a misfit at infantry camp when conscripted into the Army back in '35, but now, he was king, in a kingdom that had no international boundaries except ‘their ground’ or ‘ours’, alive or dead. His Christian name was Ivan, and he wondered what kind of woman he rescued from the SS on orders from ‘the mole’, through at least three nodes in the chain of command.

“You are alright?” he asked Karen in Russian, then Ukrainian, as she sat on the saddle, hands tied to the horn, orders from the Commandress as well as “the Sergeant”, a man whose face was never seen, but voice always heard.

“I’m on your side,” she protested in her best hand-language, “I’m American!” she insisted, loudly.

Ivan smiled, his curled mustache complimenting his loving eyes. But what kind of loving was it? Love of spirit, mind or body? And was Cossack love infested with carnal lust? She had seen it before.

Then, an idea. “You cut the ropes with your sword, and I let you put your sword into my sheath,” she said, pointing to her vagina, lifting her skirt, allowing the Cossack a glimpse of her still-sexy bruised left leg.

He stroked his mustache, pondered the proposition, then asked, “American?”.

“Da,” her positive reply. “Comrade,” her next comeback.

Ivan asked himself, then his horse. Still, lingering doubts to the proposition.

Time to up the ante, and collect on those favors she did for the People’s Revolution in 1917 when she was on the other side of the Great Waters. “Long live Trotsky! Long live the People’s Revolution! Long live the Proletariate! A Worker’s Paradise.” Then, a chorus of the Internationale...the anthem that inspired the overthrow of the Czar and the institution of Carl Marx’s Utopian Ideas of sharing and caring on an international scale---pre-Stalin. Then...sporadic joining in from a mounted Infantryman to her left, a wounded soldier on a wagon behind her, and even the Commandress. By the tone of the voice, even the

Sergeant seemed to be joining in from his position at point. A joyful enthusiasm in the mounted mobile camp that gave meaning to WHY the war had to be fought, and what kind of Paradise could be built after it was over.

From Ivan, a stare of indignation and hatred for Karen. “Bolshevik bitch!” he snarled at her in a gravelly tone loud enough to just be heard by her. With that, he pulled his horse to the left and galloped away, repulsed by her smile, her enthusiasm, and her politics.

The Commandress rode up to Karen. “White Russian,” she commented. “Still a White Russian. Who fought Red Bolshevik Russians in 1919.”

“So why do you let him live, and fight with you?” Karen inquired.

“He’s still Russian.” The Commandress seemed well-seasoned, and dedicated to a Cause within a cause, somehow.

“What’s he doing in the Red Army?”

“He enlisted to save his family.”

“Who he’s fighting for...”

“We all fight for family. And when the family’s gone, we find another family to fight for. But I wouldn’t expect you to know that, War Whore.”

“My name is Karen!” the American expatriate asserted.

“Yes, we know, Whore Lubinska. Commissioned in the Red Army in the Special Entertainment Brigade, with a sub-specialty as a Research Scientist.”

“And you don’t believe me.”

“I believe what I see. I believe that under those bruises, you have a body that would enable most men, and many women, to have the kinds of pleasure you need at night to get you through another day.”

Karen noted the loneliness and other agenda under the Commandress’ intergender reference. Unlike the men around her, she seemed willing to take command, and responsibility. With that courage took a special responsibility, particularly if the stories about Stalin killing or imprisoning 90% of his top military officers back in 1939, at least ten ‘alliances’ ago, were really true. But before she could use it as a wedge to cut through to the vulnerable soul underneath her leather tough hide---

“And I know that women give better love to other women than men can!” the Commandress fired back at Karen’s sincerely inquisitive eyes. “Under normal circumstances I would cut you lose for my own pleasure.”

“On top or the bottom?” Karen challenged with a bait that gave the observer the option to pick its real flavor.

The Commandress smiled, remembering things never to be written in a military report, diary or even her eyes. All three would be too easily read. “I would decide when we get there,” she offered, tenderly. “But love and war mix like oil and tomato juice.”

“That’s oil and water. Because they have different solubility co-efficients and polarities in their molecular structure. One has a balanced charge, the other has negative ions on one side, positive ones on the other,” Karen offered.

“Interesting double talk from a scientist who didn’t know how to fix that truck ten kilometers back.”

“Mechanics fix trucks,” Karen asserted. “Scientists build them.” She tugged on the ropes keeping her bound to the saddle, the bruises on her wrists breaking out into blistering blood. “We are in this together. If I can get to a radio---“

“---You can ask President Roosevelt to send us tanks, machine guns and mortars? Roosevelt doesn’t even know we even exist.”

“Buck White does. He’s a lot more powerful than Roosevelt, or Churchill.”

“I never heard of Buck White. And neither has the Sergeant.”

“Exactly!” Karen asserted. “Ask Basili. Known to the Germans who he now fights as Wilhelm. His fight, our fight, is now your fight, Comrade.”

The Commandress looked ahead. The pass through the mountains was there, as promised by ‘the mole’. So was the path of least resistance. It had been three days, and no German mortar fire, machine gun rattling, or even snipers. Not even a German plane above them. Apparently, ‘the Mole’ did know the German invasion plan, and battle positions.

“Is Basili taking us to Switzerland? All of this seems too quiet.”

“An Army that’s regrouped is a stronger one,” Karen offered. “That’s what’s in it for you.”

“And what is in Basili’s agenda for you?” the Commandress asked.

“That’s my problem, not yours,” Karen offered with an independent Spirit of self-reliance worthy of an ardent Pacifist facing a firing squad for performing an act of decency against a human being deemed ‘enemy’ by accidents of politics. “The War is our collective business. My survival, and life, is mine.”

A piece of paper came into the Commandress’ hand, delivered by a boy with one and a half legs, and a freshly-wounded hand barely still holding onto his arm.

“Hmmm,” she said calmly. “As expected, and required.”

“What?” Karen inquired.

“Order 227. Any Soviet citizen who surrenders to or is captured by the Germans will be considered a traitor to the Motherland.”

“And...” The American Bolshevik was genuinely curious, and terrified of the answer..

“Cowards will be shot, or worse.,” the Commandress, with an officer’s bearing, still in an enlisted Man’s uniform continued. “But we DO still have choices. Be shot by the Nazis, be hung by Stalin or do our duty as we must, and in the deepest of our hearts, want to.”

The cost of that ‘duty’ was already evident. Karen did the body count. For every German killed or captured, ten Russians lay dead. Something in her said that ‘acceptable kill ratio’ would be the Red Army, and the Russian people’s, only salvation.

The Commandress gazed downward at Steppe grasses, knowing that within a week, or a month, they would be burnt and grinded down to brown stubble. Maybe it would be the last time she would see these grasses that sustained her childhood. Smell the flowers blooming between the trees, each species taking its turn on the Stage of Life Mother Nature provided. Feel the gentleness of a warming Spring Sun

after a long, hard winter. Touch the weightless fluffs of cottontails dancing in front of her eyes in the liling May wind. It was a moment too special for words, but some words had to be said in this moment that would have to last forever. “My name is Elena,” the Commandress confessed to Karen.

With that, she spurred her horse on, adjusting to its fast trot as she took her position behind the ‘Division’, at the orders of the Sergeant up front.

CHAPTER 23

How Basili, aka Wilhelm, aka Billy-whoever-who-knows-where-else found the new headquarters for the regrouping Red Army was a mystery to Elena, as well as the Sergeant. Maybe it was because he knew this part of the world better than anyone else, even Ivan the White Cossack. Or maybe he knew the German invasion plan, a three-week split-second blitzkrieg that took the path of least resistance of machinery with no contingency for a war that would last more than 21 days. There was nothing in the Julikan Valley except rock, sagebrush, and mountains which barely sustained a billygoat. The oil fields to the South East were the riches Hitler was after, not the golden challices and icons in the Churches of Red Square. Even Stalin’s scalp was a low item on the Reich’s agenda. After all, the Slavs were an inferior race, lower tier servants for the Bold New World dreamed about by Adolf since he first saw the Opera Rienze back in his pre-teen years. “How Wagner must be rolling over in his grave now!” Basili, and Wilhelm, thought everytime he heard the Maestro’s Music distorted to make a Nation he loved march to its own death.

It was Wagner that Wilhelm remembered as the sun set to the West, his homeland, over the Ural Mountains. “Remembering home?” Red Army Sergeant Lizinkov asked him in German.

“Recreating it,” Wilhelm commented.

“Do you think we can beat them?” Lizinkov inquired, looking around to see that none of his men, or women, could understand him.

“You’ll have to,” Wilhelm replied. “I told you everything I know. Really.”

“I know,” Lizinkov replied.

“You aren’t going to interrogate me to get me to tell lies, as well as the truth?” Wilhelm pressed. “We Germans are experts in precision, you Russians are the ones who have learned so many ways to be cruel.”

“Especially against ourselves, particularly after the Party decides to make for better leadership by killing or imprisoning 90% of our highest ranking officers, leaving the command to those who are cleverest or most cruel.” Lizinkov confessed. “But it’s a way we better ourselves. You have to be Russian to understand.” He paused, gazing at Karen, helping out with the wounded. Her hands were unbound, her heart bolted to the blood-soaked ground of the hospital. “You say she is talented, but all she seems able to do is wipe the heads of the wounded and cry for them as they are dying.”

“I still think she could be useful,” Wilhelm related offering nothing as to agenda or subtext.

“To you, or us?”

“To herself, I think. After...” He pondered the issue, and the plan, revising it one more time.

“....She works off that belly of fat under her blouse?” Lizinkov added.

“Something like that,” Wilhelm concluded.

CHAPTER 24

Two days later, the first Russian victory against the Nazi advanced happened, something not accounted for in the Blitzkrieg East plan. It was one of those unrecorded victories with numbers no large enough to make the history books, or even Pravda. Five tanks, a hundred and fifty-two machine guns, twenty mortars and nearly four hundred and thirty German prisoners. A remarkable showing for an assembly of what was left of three Red Army companies and five lost platoons. All made possible with ‘minimal’ casualties because of Wilhelm’s intelligence information, an unprecedented four Russians dead per one Fascist Nazi killed.. Barely ten percent of the Russians had the sufficient literacy ability to write down the account in print, but it would be remembered in their hearts, where it counted.

Lizinkov would not repeat Stalin’s mistakes, particularly the one which resulted in the execution of a German deserter in April who told the Russian High Command that there would be an invasion to begin at 3AM, June 21. ALL German soldiers would be interrogated, and believed. As for leaving them alive after they surrendered, orders and practicality said ‘no’. But overall, it was a good day. Prisoners were being released from the Gulags to fight for Mother Russia, and there was freedom within the chaos. And Stalin had apparently come out of his ‘retreat’, handing down all Central Directives himself.

Still, the overall situation looked bad, for Mother Russia and, ultimately, Lady Liberty. “I can see it on your faces,” Karen said to Elena as she mounted the mare given to her as a gift for her information and intensity of caring. “I’ll get Roosevelt to come into this War if it kills me.”

“If you get killed, you won’t be able to get him over here,” Elena said, loading the pack horse with an extra helping of captured field German food rations, snuck on under a hole-ridden blanket. “You have to go to a safe place, with your man.”

“Basili, ‘the mole. Wilhelm. He’s not my man!” Karen protested.

“He wants to be. And a woman in your condition...”

“What condition?” Karen asked, feeling a pain in her abdomen.

Elena laid her hand on Karen’s belly. “You’re eating for two now. This is the family you must live for right now.”

“I’m not---“

“Of course you are,” Elena insisted, loading a pistol with a bagfull of bullets. “Being pregnant is a gift and a curse these days. God help, bless and damn you.”

“How do you know I’m?...”

Elena laid her hand on Karen’s arm with a warm not shared, or felt, for years. “You glow. You have a look in your eyes. And you have missed your period, by your own account. And that smell between your legs tells me the nursery is occupied.” She looked to the dwarf-like Bavarian imp assembling the best

parts of the captured German radio equipment to be re-assembled for his new job as an agent working on his own terms, for a currency measured in the heart rather than on a bank balance.

Karen didn't know what to say, or believe. Elena filled in some of the gaps, given what she knew, or could guess.

"If the child has Wilhelm's nose, I can get my brother to chop some of it off when the time comes. If he, or she, gets that troll's mouth, the only recommendation I can make is to have it learn to sing beautiful poetry out of it."

"He can't be the father!" Karen exhaled in disbelief of the facts staring her straight in the belly.

"This is too bad," Elena said. "A man with a resilient soul is rare. But you are your baby's mother. This you must remember."

Elena knew enough not to ask about the identity of the father. Her smiles, gentle songs, and extra rations from her own survival kit said "this child will be our hope of the new world."

For Karen, the realization of horror, despite the intelligence reports that the leader of the Third Reich was biologically incapable of breeding offspring. Unless she had become a Catholic Saint overnight for Immaculate Conception, there could only be one father. "Adolf Hitler's child in my body!" echoed between her ears.

CHAPTER 25

For reasons that Elena never revealed, she ordered that Karen, ‘the mole’ and a special escort be given special permission to take leave of the fighting. The map provided for her assigned destinations led to heavily wooded regions protected from the elements, Nazi troops, and Russian Partisans who fought strictly for themselves against anyone less armed. Karen felt cushioned from the War, but not from the conflict inside her Soul.

Pure evil was something talked about, but seldom experienced. The evening in the Bavarian Castle with the Housepainter showed Karen what evil really was. And it had filtered into every pore of Hitler’s body, and mind, maybe soul. Now, it was inside her womb. But that was witchcraft. Superstition. “The devil doesn’t exist,” she kept telling herself as the trail led to fruit trees now black with soot, not a drop of fruit or leaf on their branches. “It’s just biology. A mother creates the child, not the father who dumped his love juices into the tank,” she told herself as Wilhelm’s guide pointed to a pass around the Co-operative Village converted to ashes by fleeing Russian soldiers and civilians. “And besides, maybe Elena is wrong. I don’t feel pregnant. It’s just some gassy cabbage.” Karen pounded her belly, listening for a tympany of empty inside.

“Demon seed,” Yolinki commented from behind a Mongolian hat and a Fu Man Chu moustache worthy of Ghengis Khan, rumored to have been responsible for his birth after a consensual rape a mere millenium or so earlier. He trotted up to Karen from position at drag, six-feet of pure power, and wisdom in the saddle of the two year old colt he had turned into a well-trained stallion after having only been on it for the last two miles. His blue eyes penetrated into Karen’s, leaving no secret unseen, no skeletons un-rattled.

“What’s he looking at, Wilhelm?” Karen asked.

“Your soul, I suppose,” the comment from the mounted troll-man. “He already had a look into mine and it didn’t interest him. People like him think people like me are boring.”

“And what kind of person does he think I am?” Karen stood tall in the saddle, pretending that bobbing of the horse’s head was her idea.

“He thinks that you are with me.” Wilhelm boasted. Indeed, the idea fit around him better than expected. “We’re the first free people he’s seen since he was arrested.”

The Mongol guide smiled, but something in the eyes didn’t match the face.

“What was he arrested for?” she pressed, trying to stare him down, but losing at every volley of the game.

“The same as everyone else. Knowing too much.”

“And why was he let go?” Karen inquired of the man whose eyes looked ‘fresh out’ of the joint, his perspectives still out of joint, his teeth missing behind a fearful smile. And the tattoo on his arm, still fresh, belying the ‘why’.

“Stalin must have figured out that using political prisoners to fight the Germans will be better use of their flesh than turning them into sausages,” Wilhelm commented. “Or, our Mongolian ‘escort’ knows more than his jailers did,” he cautiously speculated.

“Yeah,” Karen surmised as the eyes twinkled something hopeful. “Maybe he knows something we both need to know.”

“Demon seed,” the Mongol ex-con commented sorrowfully, with an empathy deeper than anyone, even Michael, when he still was Michael. Yolinki loosened the twine around his coat, revealing a knife with a handle that said ‘solid’ and an eight inch blade that said ‘business’, pointing to its tip.

“Yeah, I know. I’m the mother. I still have options,” Karen said. “I was hoping you had a coat hanger instead,” she continued, indicating the motion required to expel the fetus before it would have time to become a baby.

Yolinki nodded ‘no’, signaling the horses to stop with a gentle command in Mongolian and a mild touch on Karen’s reins. He took a medicine bag out of his belt. A leather pouch with hastily painted figures from his homeland, five thousand miles to the East and a thousand years back. From it he removed a soft rock, rubbing it on Karen’s belly, putting it in her hand, then showing her how to rub it on her forehead.

Wilhelm watched, from a distance, as Karen came under Yolinki’s spell. Eight years in the Gulag for upholding his Native Religion had only strengthened his ability to administrate it. Karen understood none of the Buddhist-Mongolian incantations, but felt all of their meanings. “It will be alright, for you and the child,” he seemed to say to her.

Wilhelm never believed in God, but he believed in His Ministers. Maybe if man tried hard enough, and did God’s Work, God would be created. Man creating God out of strength rather than weakness...What a concept! The woods felt calm, sustaining. The Silence became louder, sustaining him as it once did before he ventured into the world outside the Black Forest. Maybe the Holy Trinity was about a Mongolian Healer, a Pregnant ex-Pacifist, and a freelance Spy for hire combining abilities and perspectives so they could get to a safe haven and provide a home for a baby whose birth could stop the War. Maybe it would be a girl, Adolpha smiling at her father when he comes tromping into Russia with his army and she would melt his anger in a pool of love, calling a halt to all hostilities everywhere.

The accompaniment to the fantasy on horseback was real enough. Birds, squirrels and frogs frolicking about in what was left of the underbrush. But even then were on their way out, as the sound of tanks and trucks approached from the West, North and South.

“Eastward ho!” Wilhelm asked Yoliski, pointing towards the snowcapped mountains.

“Da,” the Mongol noted, spurring his horse on, scouting the area ahead.

Karen trotted ahead, feeling in control of the horse for the first time since leaving camp. “Where are we going?” she asked Wilhelm.

“The safest place for sane people in an insane world,” Wilhelm stated.

“Jail?” Karen mused.

“Absolutely correct,” the reply with a smile that said that the best, and worse, was about to come.

CHAPTER 26

'Die Meistersinger' came out of the crackly radio with crystal clarity. Bold, expressive notes and music from Wagner's only 'comedic' opera. No one in after-hours officers-only 'Pub' was laughing. It was just background noise to most of them by now.

Michael Wilson heard the news on the phone receiver. He said nothing, revealed nothing, and when the final statement was delivered, felt nothing. Turning shock into something he could make sense of, he abruptly slammed down the phone receiver, arousing looks of concern from everyone in the room.

"What is wrong, Major Wilson?" Colonel Holz asked in a calm, disapproving voice.

"My people have deserted me!" Michael hid his face in a corner of the converted Jewish Bookstore and Art Gallery now bearing books and paintings of a more Aryan nature. "The fuckers have left me out to dry! After I gave them everything I had..." The American expatriate clenched his sweating and shaking fingers in a tight fist.

"That's because we are your people now, Major Wilson," Holz related with an affirmative whisper. He poured the American expatriate a Napoleonic Brandy from his personal stock. The Prussian Aristocrat turned to his Party-member staff, dismissing them from their after hours unofficial duty of fraternizing with each other.

Michael held his temper. Holz increased the volume on the radio. Michael's fist grew firmer, his hand moving in tempo with the boldly expressive pride of the music.

"Die Meistersinger," Holz said. "Bold music to those of us who are really...Enlightened." Holz sung along with the chorus.

Michael felt the power of the music, its basic commitment to the rugged individualist who was on a Mission, and how wondrous a Mission when there were other rugged individualists working with you. Its primal Fire. The kind of Fire that few people really had, or appreciated. But, from Michael's perspective, Holz was one of those few Comrades. Or so he hoped.

As if timed by a Power greater than himself, or a Destiny to which he was truly born, Michael felt Holz's hand on his shoulder. "You know what this war is really about? Or should be about, Major Wilson?"

"About me being a General in the American Army rather than being a Major?" Wilson replied smugly, and justifiably. "Maybe a Senator instead of..." He brought the brandy snifter to his lips, set in place for a large gulp of the the 60 proof , 160 year old brew.

"---No!" Holz interjected. "We are gentlemen, leaders and mentors. We sip our Brandy, even when we are thirsty, or worse. The Untermench, the Lower man, gives in to his lower passions and lesser reason."

"And smaller mind." Michael added, sipping the stock of special 'sauce' that Holz shared with no one except his most trusted Comrades, and friends. "Yes," the Beacon Hill-born Bostonian continued in the Harvardese that was his right, and well-earned earned privilege to speak. "It is our job to serve, and protect the Untermench from himself. And their own destructive actions. The illiterate masses who burned down the library at Alexandria in Ancient Egypt. The Catholic Church that punished every bold thought

from a scientist, scholar or artist with the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. The Bankers and Lawyers who bought up shares in the Wild West after REAL American pioneers earned it.”

“And the Bolsheviks, who promised people freedom and made them slaves instead,” Holz continued. “Encouraging NO one to take responsibility for their actions. The group takes care of everyone, everyone does his job, and the most important job is to complain, or gossip about complainers.” Holz’s chuckle had an element of pity and a certain brand of Compassion. Not quite in line with German Nazism, but very familiar to Wilson in another form.

“Yes, the White Man’s burden,” Michael concluded, recalling Churchill’s solution to the “India and Africa” problems. “The THINKING White Man’s burden. The always-present job to serve and protect those who are...”

“Less than us,” Colonel Holz continued. “Yes, one must admit what is true, my Friend. As those born with superior genetics and who have USED them, it is our job to serve, protect and, when necessary, control the Untermench. Be he a Slovak, a Russian, a Negro, a Jew, an Asiatic, an American, a Pole, or even a German.”

“So,” ‘Major’ Wilson challenged Colonel Holz. “Germans are not always superior Obermench, and everyone else isn’t always an inferior Untermench?”

Holz lowered his brandy, and his guard, and elevated the level of the music. He turned Michael to a shiny reflection, something his ‘guest’ had avoided the whole evening. “Look at yourself in the mirror.”

Michael looked at himself in the mirror, seeing something he hardly expected, but seemed to need.

“Our uniforms make you look distinguished.” Holz smiled with pride, continuing his observation. “American insignia on it, of course, under ours. It is only a matter of time till Roosevelt joins the war against the real tyrants of this world.”

“Stalin,” Michael said, taking a more open view of himself in a freshly-pressed uniform adorned with swastikas and the red, white and blue designed to make even George Washington proud to be goose-stepping with the Fuhrer.

“Yes, Stalin,” Holz reminded Michael. “You remember what he did in the Ukraine, to some of your own relatives who were...”

Michael said nothing. It was common knowledge that if the worse could happen in Stalin’s Socialist Paradise after Lenin’s death could happen, it did, and that it happened to people you cared about most.

“We know where they are. All of them. Those ‘relations’ your own White Anglo-Saxon Family never acknowledged, or needed to care about. Uncle Alexi, Aunt Nadia, your grandmother, Baba Helena and your father, and your brother. Your government won’t get them out, so we will. A ‘side deal’ between we Obermench.”

Michael contemplated the unofficial, yet very real, options on the table. And that always-present quandry about sacrificing the few for the many, even if those ‘few’ were ones you once cared about, or still do. “And all I have to do is...” he advanced.

“The rational thing. We are a rational country. Sometimes, cruel, but for a reason. You owe your family everything, and Karen you owe...”

Michael kept the rest to himself. The battles for human rights in the US of A fought by himself and Karen in ways that made it feel like a dance rather than a struggle, inspired by what Lenin promised in

1917 and what Stalin took away in 1925. The prospects of raising a family of their own perhaps, creating a Utopia that only they would share. The events around Karen's arrest and conviction.

"One of the Russian prisoners we captured said she was pregnant," Holz said, lighting a cigarette, offering one to his guest, and unofficial co-worker. "With the highest quality seed in the Fatherland. A seed which the doctors didn't think existed."

"What prisoner?" Michael asked, his hopes raised by the prospect that Karen might still be Alive. "Can I talk to her, or rather...him?"

"Only if you can converse with the dead, Major Wilson. Our prisoner got shot trying to escape."

"I see."

Holz lowered his eyes. "Actually, she slit her own wrists after she talked. She was very brave, but everybody talks."

"Let Karen and me go back home and we won't talk, about anything here."

"You'll talk to your interrogators, just like the Russian prisoner talked to us, Michael." Holz said in a fatherly tone.

Michael looked around him. The doors seemed locked. But even if they weren't, Holz was the kind of man, and Obermench, from whom you could never really escape. The circle would always come back to him, one way or another.

"You are an enlightened man, my friend, but still a man," the Colonel continued acting more as a General, or President. "We are all men, even we Obermench."

"What do you want?" Michael asked, taking in a deep breath, prepared to finish what he started.

"The child. The Wench is yours, if you still want her."

"Karen Lubinska is no Wench, Colonel, Sir."

Holz smuggly blew out a cloud of smoke, letting it float through the air. Michael coughed. "There are those who were born to the Enlightenment, and those who stumbled into it. According to what you told me, and didn't tell me, about Miss 'Lubinska', she always had to struggle for everything she got. Or maybe got it from you. Though she may be 'smart', she will never be intelligent. Though clever, she will never be wise. Though working for the Enlightenment, she will always be its servant."

"This doesn't have anything to do with her being a Polish Jew?" Michael advanced.

"For the moment, it does, I am afraid. Besides being a whore, she is, or could be, or could be said to be the kind of woman who expresses love to those who are not men." Holz put out his cigarette. "For the greater good, of which you and me are a part, whether we know it, or like it."

"You won't shoot Karen after she delivers the Fuhrer's baby!" Michael trembled with fear he never thought possible.

"That depends on how quickly you help us find her." Holz offered Michael a cigar. "Here. Your turn to blow smoke into those faces that need it."

"I don't smoke. Unless it's with a client," he mused, remembering Karen's whimsical remark in the days of yore, barely a month earlier, when they were still on the same side.

But Holz wasn't amused, or interested. Michael accepted the smoke, and the invitation to sit down for his receive his specific orders, with no more options.

CHAPTER 27

Wilhelm cursed the teacher who tried to teach him physics when he was an obstinate boy of nine. But now as he was approaching forty-nine, it was a blessing to have had "Herr Chemist" with the thick-rimmed glasses, mousy voice and graying hair as a mentor. "What would he have me do now?" Wilhelm asked himself as the last transistor on the radio broke as he carefully tried to re-insert it into the slot which, sort of, fit the base. "Herr Chemist!" he blasted out into gray sky above, threatening to rain, snow or sleet, but frustratingly doing nothing at all. "You get down here right now and tell me how this radio is supposed to work!"

He looked to Yolinki, hoping the Mongol Mystic might have some idea of how to contact his old mentor, or maybe the ghost of Marconi, or maybe, if he was still alive, Nicholi Tesla, the man who could fix, or create, or failing that, understand, most anything. But no go...The last message out to Churchill would have to do, along with the last offer, and order.

Wilhelm looked to the woman he considered a bother, then a burden, and now a daughter. She sat near the burning embers of a fire, rocking like a baby, holding firm to her convictions like a rock. She had kept her distance for the last five days, even around the campfire, saying little to anyone, except the child inside. A mixture of curses and blessings, so they seemed. Even Wilhelm's English wasn't good enough to understand a Brooklyn Catholic-Jew trying to figure out whether it was her who was guilty, the world, or both.

Yolinki climbed up the hill, the escalated elevation and snow on the ground to his liking.

"We need more firewood, now, and fast," Wilhelm said in Russian.

"No understand Moscovite Russian," he shrugged as he breathed in fresh, cool air, for the first time in three years.

"I found you, and I can lose you," Wilhelm affirmed in the Slavic tongue that was Yolinki's second, and least favorite, language.

"You found ME?" the Asiatic replied in Russian heavily laden with a Mongolian accent. "I knew you were looking for someone like me when you stumbled into that Red Army Camp."

"You know a lot about these woods and a woman's body, but you never know what I am thinking. No one knows what I am thinking, not even myself sometimes!" Wilhelm boasted with the bravado of a Maestro demanding respect from an upstart insolent piano student. "You may know where we're going, but I know 'why' we're going there."

"The man on the other side of that broken radio told you?" Yolinki mused with a gentle smile.

"You do your job, I'll do mine," Wilhelm gazed down at Karen, chewing off the last of the beef jerky. "And when it comes her turn, she'll do her job, too."

"And what about the baby's job?" Yolinki inquired, refusing to take 'classified' as an answer.

Wilhelm considered the matter once again, from the inside and the outside. "A poker chip, or an ace in the hole. In Churchill's hand, it will be a full house. Right now, England, and Russia, are holding empty hands. A king will give up a kingdom for an heir, or at least lose enough composure for us to give him an uppercut in the chin, and the balls."

Yolinki understood little about poker, and less about boxing. But he knew enough to ask the most important question of all.

“What if she decides to not have the child, or keep it for herself?” the Mongol Master of mind, body and spirit asked.

“There are some questions we don’t ask, or answer,” Wilhelm noted with a tone that said ‘final’. “The consequences of being wrong, or right, are too great.” He looked to his right, then his left. “Footprints,” he noted. “What kind of animal?”

“A wounded one,” Yolinki said, observing that one of the limbs had barely touched the snow to leave its mark.

“Like us.”

“There are the hunted and the hunters,” Yolinki cocked the hammer of his rifle and snuck into the brush to retrieve supper.

“Except a baby who might be the bargaining chip for good, or a new seed for evil,” Wilhelm pondered as he prepared for another night of dinner around the campfire and conversation that had nothing to do with what he was thinking, or wanting.

CHAPTER 28

The train pulled into the station at 9 AM, or at least what was left of it. The sign over Roliska was once colorful, reflecting a productive, and even happy, town. Now it was a charred slab of wood, the host town occupied by roaches, rats and whatever refugees needed to be there. Still, there were questions to ask, and Colonel Holz was under the strictest of orders.

“How many Jews do you have here?” he asked the rag-covered, half-blind, half-deaf 75 year old man half-way to death. “For every Jew you give me, I give you a piece of bread.”

“A fair exchange,” the baker, now begger, contemplated, thinking about the children still seeking shelter under the rubble. “Three!?” he said through a mouth of rotted and missing teeth. “Three Jews!”

“Where?” Holz asked, showing him the culinary merchandize, freshly baked a week ago.

“There!” the old man said, pointing to the boards of a fallen shack, a Church in 1917, a meeting hall for the Communist Party three years afterwards. He grabbed the bread, and fled, hiding his face. Holz’s men dragged up the boards and found three bodies, dead for at least two months, half eaten.

“Animals,” Holz commented to Michael, about to lose his lunch, dinner and ten meals still left in his rancid gut. “If we Germans are starving, we won’t eat human flesh. Even when we were starving, left to rot in a bankrupt country after the Treaty of Versaille handed over our National Economy to the Jews and the Communists. No German ever ate German flesh, or Jewish flesh.”

“No,” Michael added. “We just make soap out of them now.”

Holz kept silent. He knew that Michael knew the secret, and the ultimate plan. Perhaps he could be converted into soap after this whole thing was over, but it was far from over. And rewards were to be had by both Michael and himself. For the ex-patriate American, a return ticket home, maybe even as a hero with a spin from the Nazi press. Maybe even with his girlfriend. And for Holz...a personal promise from the Fuhrer himself.

“What was the name of the baby supposed to be?” Michael asked.

“Hans,” Holz said as he scouted the village for evidence of people ready to talk.

“Hans Holz Hitler,” Michael mused. “It’s got a ring to it. Something you could dance to.”

Before Michael could release the first chuckle or swing his tired feet into the first step of the dance, he found a gun barrel rammed into his head. “I can shoot you now and no one will know you even existed.”

“But you won’t. You have your orders. Right?”

Indeed Holz did have orders, and bait to carry them out with. As the German troops behind him got off the train to make the best shelters they could from the debris left by the fleeing Red Army, he posted the paper. “Wanted, Alive. Karen Lubinska, Child Raper and Murderess of Innocent Russian Citizens”. It was a convincing set of lies, the reward quite substantial.

“Ten thousand Marks!” Michael stated. “A king’s ransom. How much is that in Rupples?”

“More than Stalin has.”

“And dollars?”

“You can count it when we get her,” the official note with a grimace.

“It’s not about the money,” Michael asserted.

“So you can give it to me, or these miserable creatures roaming around here who were once people.”

“They’ve suffered a lot, from Stalin. And from you?”

Holz smiled. “Nazis can be compassionate.”

“To other Nazis.”

“Americans are most kind to their fellow countrymen, Major Wilson. Christians to other Christians. Even Jews to other Jews. It’s human nature.”

“As is turning over your best friend to her enemy.”

“If she makes us her enemy, that is her choice. You will talk to her when we find her, yes?”

“Yes.” Michael said, observing the smoke in the distance. “We will have a very long talk.”

No one did much talking as the trek to the next 'permanently-safe winter Haven' lingered onto its fourth month. Wilhelm always determined the destination. His inner eye seemed to sense where Karen and her child could remain away from the Germans tanks and planes that carved their way into the mass of Russia like a scalpel through butter. With winter coming on, Karen Lubinska and her 'demon seed' would need a place that was reasonably-protected from the elements. South would be a logical direction, but where there were warm winds there were also oil fields, mines and bountiful harvests actively sought and seized by Hitler's Panzer divisions. North would be accessibly, but even Yolinki knew the hazards of being en route to a Northern retreat in the middle of November.

Wilhelm plotted the course, with notes he never shared with Karen, or Yolinki. Where there was the Russian Army, there would soon be the Germans. And where there was anyone else with a gun, it was often a Partisan Army living in their own newly- formed 'Republic', running their hundred, ten or one square miles of territory as the own country, slaying ANY invaders as enemies of their new state. Some were ex-Whites, some ex-Reds, some displaced Poles who were trying to establish their own country in the middle of their arch enemy, 'Mother Russia', some Chechnyan Moslems as well.

Karen heard about it from the 'men' talking in camp when they thought she was asleep. Traveling incognito, she was required to not speak, even when spoken to. Her Russian still had an American accent and there was no way she could pass herself off as a Russian peasant, as even the most uneducated of them were well-trained in what Stalin promised, and commanded. And all could use 10,000 Marks in the service of themselves, or Comrade Stalin. Wilhelm's Russian was acceptable, but Yolinki did most of the talking, a 'command' that seemed to be silently given, and accepted, after they left the 'haven' of 'Commander Elena's' battalion.

Every waking and dreaming moment of Karen's was focused on the life, or 'problem' in her womb, but sometimes thoughts of others came in. An unexpected guest into her troubled and increasingly-weary mind was Elena, the Commandress who was so hard on the outside, and so...something else on the inside.

Under her Command, it seemed that Order Number One of 1917 had been in operation, enlisted men encouraged and expected to question their officers. Its suspension in 1925 was, according to the functional New York Bolshevics, necessary. An Army must be ruled by the wisest, not the loudest.

But as the War raged on, was it now the strongest, and most manipulative? Certainly strength and manipulation were the tools Stalin used to carve his way to the top of the ladder. And 'strategy' was the most powerful tool of all, more effective than even heroics. The fields filled with Russian dead who put heroics ahead of trickery, taking on German invaders with massive frontal assaults, reminded 'Frau Lubinska' that this was a war of perseverance AND perception.

There was one perception which was becoming more and more of a reality. That 'gassy' feeling in her stomach was not hunger. The 'demon seed' inside her womb was growing, fast and firm. But though biology said it was half devil, demented-demon or deluded-dictator, it was all hers. She had put off making the 'irreversible' decision too long. Approaching the fifth month, it seemed to have a brain of its own, a mind that was developing and a Soul which was still an open slate. Though Yolinki still muttered 'demon seed' regarding the child, Wilhelm kept the Mongolian Buddhist-turned-warrior from concocting special teas that would cause a mis-carriage. At least that's what Karen read between the lines in the tongues that the 'men' shared amongst themselves.

As usual, Wilhelm stopped his horse just behind a wooded overlook or thick brush around the town in question. Yoliski would then ride around the village at a gallop, then return, his horse winded, his breath gone, his answer, 'no'.

"No!" Karen screamed, her ass worn to nothing in the saddle, her patience finally gone, her reason yielding to rage. "We stop here!" she blasted out into the fog, thick and shifting, having a mind of its own in the hills around the town below. "We stop HERE and NOW!" she affirmed in clear English, broken Russian and Prussian German.

“No, not yet. I have a better place in mine,” Wilhelm related quietly.

“I’m pregnant! I need rest. A REAL doctor. REAL food. REAL milk, not mare’s milk. REAL meat, not horse blood. And REAL walls to sleep behind!” she screamed. “And the REAL reason why you’ve BOTH been looking at me like I’m a piece of meat you’re waiting to sell at the market!”

“I can sell you right now, for top dollar, Blondy!” Wilhelm blasted back, grabbing the paper Yolinki had torn off the town hall wall. He rammed the crumbled poster in front of her shocked face. “Look! You are Wanted, ‘No questions asked, now twenty-thousand Marks. American Woman with long blonde hair, blue eyes and big mouth’.”

“It reads ‘big lips’,” she noted, flippantly.

Yolinki commented something back, a grimace on his face, a sense of foreboding doom all around him. A statement of finality in a tongue Karen didn’t speak, or recognize.

“What did he say?” Karen asked Wilhelm. “As if you’re going to tell me anyway.”

“That we have to move on to the next village, now.” Wilhelm noted Karen’s long blonde lockes, falling outside the blanket that was now worn down to a shawl. His inner ear heard something in the distant brush. “They spotted us.”

“Who?”

Gunshots rang out of the woods, horse’s hoofs behind them.

“Someone who wants twenty thousand marks,” Wilhelm yelled out as Karen tried to duck for cover, futilely cringing in the saddle.

“Which way?” Wilhelm asked Yolinki.

The Mongol rode out in a gallop over a ledge, landing, apparently, somewhere on the other side.

“I can’t...I can’t!” Karen screamed out. Bullets spooked her horse on the left, right, and behind.

“You have to,” Wilhelm blasted back. He wacked Karen’s horse on the ass, firing a bullet into the ground just below its feet. “Hold onto the mane! Look to the sky! Give that Goddamn horse his head!”

Karen obeyed Wilhelm’s instructions, to the letter, watching the gelding under her shaking legs run to a ledge that had only pea-soup beyond it, jump into the deep blue sky, finally to land on...

“Snow!” Karen muttered as the horse fell onto a four foot pile of white powder that broke her fall, throwing her safely off to the side, on top of the cushion Mother Nature had provided. “Snow! Thank God, it’s snow!”

Behind her, more gunshots, some Viking screams from Wilhelm. “To Valhalla!” he proclaimed. “My Soul to Valhalla, you Nazi Bolshivik Bastards!”

“Wilhelm!” she pleaded, trying to reach the other side of the stream, heard but not seen, at least a 300 foot drop to the rocky water below.

Then, an explosion, the fog getting thicker.

“Wilhelm!” she pleaded.

Everywhere around her was fog now. And in her ears, a ringing sound. Loud noises muted to nothing at all. Then, from behind, a pull on her shawl, and a rag around her mouth.

All she could do was hold onto her belly, hoping that the horseman, whoever he was this time, would be kind. And when she turned around, to see his face...

“Shut up and don’t think!” Wilhelm snarled at her, or so it translated as he signaled Yolinki to move forward, quietly.

Red blood on Spring Snow hardly looked appealing as the fog cleared a view of the other side of the abyss became clear. Karen saw what remained of the bounty hunters on her trail, their bodies mutilated by the grenade Wilhelm had been saving for, perhaps, a more personal occasion and self-directed purpose in the event that his former associates in the SS had found him. But these men who lay dead and dying in the snow were young men, hungry men, and Russian men. Maybe even Russian soldiers who would collect Nazi reward money to buy guns to fight the German Army as it was advancing on Stalingrad.

“Look closely, Blondy,” Wilhelm blasted through gritted teeth. “You’re an expensive bitch to keep around.... And an important one, God help us.”

Wilhelm had never said “God Help Us”, even as a child. Perhaps he really had used all the aces up his sleeve.

With whatever prayers he had left in him, he focused his freezing hands on the radio abandoned by the retreated Red Army, found under the armless corpse of the ‘radio man’ three villages back, and tried again. It was more like a tangled pile of wires than a radio, apparently issued, but never used. “Built by a fucking Italian!” he cursed under his breath, trying once again to rebuild what was broken perhaps from its moment of issue. “A bad workman blames his tools!” he recalled from his Electronics teacher in Bonn. “Germans must be superior to the Untermench (the lower man), even when you have to play his game”, he recalled from his military training in Dresden, even before Hitler came to power. “Sometimes success is a matter of luck,” his experience told him. Perhaps the electronic ‘junk’ salvaged from the remnants of a burning 1922 truck two burnt villages ago was the solution. Pitting his wits against the wills of stubborn machinery, letting his intensity merge with his brains with a loud curse to the gods of technology, he rammed the parts together. No input capabilities except for static. But an output mode that....seemed to work, sort of, in a very pre-Weimar Republic, pre-20th Century way. The best he could get was a Morse Code message out. At least that was what he thought, hoped, or prayed got out. And that it was understood, and by the right people. And that those people were still....alive, and listening.

CHAPTER 30

It was a bleak Christmas in London. The Blitz was on, and no one knew whose house would get blown up by the bombs next. It could be a business tycoon who owned half of Scotland and had been used to dining on Pheasant under glass, or the cold water flat of a sewer cleaner who didn’t own more than a pot to piss in, and eat out of afterwards. Everyone was equally vulnerable, and hungry. Rationing hit

everyone, the 'lean and trim' diet for once-obese Londoners very much the fashion and mandate of the day. But one mandate was ordered at every level of Command.

"It is the duty of every British Citizen and free-thinking man, woman and child in England to have a Merry Christmas," Mildred said upon arriving to thrice-relocated "Liasson Office" on December 24th, with a stoic, stiff-upper lip and an unshakable smile frozen in place. "Orders from Winny himself".

Buck White didn't know how to take it. He was shocked to see Mildred in a Dicksonsonian man's suit, adorned with holly, mistle-toe and miniature angels worthy of the finest Christmas trees back home, topped off by a large mustache pasted above her literally stiff upper lip. He even more surprised to see her refer to the Prime Minister who was in charge of what was left of the free world as 'Winny'. But there was something else in Mildred's eyes.

"I heard about your..." Buck asked, tenderly, regarding the news about her sister.

"The bombs fall where they fall," she replied, refusing to accept his outstretched hand. "It's our duty to not fall, or allow any more territory to fall to the enemy."

Buck noted, in his mind, the reference of 'the enemy'. Prior to that, Mildred, the communications officer with no last name, referred to all of the adversaries in the war by name. When the Germans advanced into the Ukraine, she referred to the generals in charge, or Hitler himself. When the Japanese advanced their way into Burma, New Guinea and within striking range of the still-American-held Philippines, it was 'Tojo and company'. This time, when she said 'the enemy' it was with a mixture of fear, anger and grief. And as for who the 'enemy' was, it was up for grabs. Her reference to 'the Yanks' was becoming less cordial of late, even resentful.

Buck knew that America was waiting for the right time to enter the War, and, unless Charles Lindburg was elected President, it would be on the side of the Allies. But the lessons of WWI were learned hard by the Brits. Americans who landed in France in 1917 weren't called the 'dough' boys because they were great bakers. American companies made a killing selling arms to Britain and Germany for three years before joining the fight against the Kaiser. And the escorts of American Merchant Marines helping the British convoys now came with a price tag. The British War debt to the US had escalated beyond any projected ability for repayment. The only ace up 'Winny's' sleeve was that America would not want its number one debtor to fall to the Nazis.

"Self interest motivates all countries, and people," Buck remembered from the UNpublished letters of George Washington. "And effectiveness in government happens by force." Washington's genius was that he merged and allied self-interests of his associates and potential enemies into a common agenda that served his Vision, or plan. The father of Buck's country was a pragmatist, like Mildred. Or so he calculated as he asked her the obvious question as she wandered into the office, in trousers for the first time since he met her.

"What's in the box?" he asked her.

"Your uniform for the day, Sir," she noted. "And a complimentary candy cane, Sir."

Buck opened the candy cane first. He tasted it, noting what it was missing. "Candy without the sugar. Good for rationing, and good for the teeth." He pretended to like it. "Thank you, he said, with gratitude to his Limey co-worker.

"Sir," she interrupted, pointing to the box.

"Sure," Buck said. He felt badly about opening up a gift which was probably unaffordable. Though the wrapping was old newspaper, it was tastefully taped, trimmed and frilled into the kind of gift given from the heart. Given by a co-worker who perhaps wanted to be more than that, for at least one day out of the year, perhaps the last year such gifts could be given between free men and women.

“What’s this?” he said, puzzled, looking inside.

“Your uniform for the day, Sir,” she replied. “Winny’s orders.”

Buck dropped his jaw . “But... I can’t....you have to take this back...I can’t.”

“You must, Sir. Or rather---”

“---Miss?” Buck replied, catching Mildred’s smile, making it wider with one of his own. “THIS is the uniform of the day?”

Mildred picked up a cigar, lit it, and sat on the desk in a very Humphry Bogartesque way. Something all British men tried to do, something all English women dreamed about. “It’s just your size, schhweheart”, she ‘shhhed’ out in Bogartese.

Buck had never seen Mildred be anyone except herself. But this was a strange custom.

“Go on, Buck. Not man enough for the challenge?” she challenged back, still in character as a Dickensonian gentleman.

Buck sat back, smirked, then found himself letting his guard down, for the first time in...he could hardly remember. “The blouse may be a little small, and the skirt is a little too short, but...what should I do about my hair?” Buck ran his fingers through his recently trimmed hair, only to find thrown in front of his lap, a blonde wig that would make any Rita Roberts look like Rita Hayword.

“Uniform of the day, schweheart,” Mildred related, taking another puff out of her cigar, ‘Winny’ style this time. “The Chief’s Orders”.

“When in Rome...” Buck thought, remembering that cross-dressing on special occasions was a British custom, a Yankee taboo. Excusing himself behind the closet door, he relieved himself of his jacket, tie and trousers, replacing it with a bra, slip, probably bootleg nylon stockings and a skirt that would show off the legs that were, to his observation, not all that hairy and rather shapely at that.

“You called this meeting because---” Buck asked, looking at the wig. It’s length was long, its style much like that of another woman who, information and misinformation indicate, had fallen through the cracks.

“---Karen Lubinska,” Mildred said, once again again reading Buck’s mind. Maybe his Soul this time as well.

Buck popped out of the closet, wig on his head. He looked into the mirror, imagining what Karen would have looked like in the outfit---or rather ‘Christmas uniform’ in which he was clothed. Keeping a poker face about the agent he feared, hated, and perhaps loved most, he continued the conversation in a business-as-usual manner. “One of ours. Is she in trouble?”

“Apparently so,” Mildred said. “We received a quite mis-spelled and grammatically-incorrect correspondence two hours ago. Addressed to you.”

Buck ripped the memo from Mildred’s hand. He recognized the source instantly. “Wilhelm. In Old English, spelt with German script structure.”

“Our German contact has read Chaucer,” Mildred noted, reading the message as related over the telegraph, its original letters in 13th century Old English.

“The bitch will give birth to a valuable dog.” The translation came from outside of Buck’s head, from someone he never thought he would see again.

Michael Wilson appeared at the door in a fresh suit, his thin, pale face scraped, his hands and wrists bearing recent cuts made most probably by barbed wire. “Wilhelm uses code, but he could have chosen his words more...discretely, ya know?”

Buck was elated. Never did he think that he would give a ‘Welcome Home Comrade’ to an American who had turned Commie. And never in an outfit that was only known to be worn by J Edgar Hoover. “How the hell are you!!!” Buck exclaimed with joy.

“What the hell are...you?” Michael said, looking at Buck’s attire.

“Christmas uniforms,” the masculine clad Mildred replied, in a British businesswoman’s tone, and voice. “Shall we get to business?” she said.

Mildred poured three drinks, and pulled up three chairs, all the drinking receptacles and sitting stations mismatched, of course. “I trust you found our new location with no trouble,” she asked Michael.

“No trouble,” Michael’s reply.

They sat down to put data to paper that would go into their heads. The material destined to be burned for firewood, Buck pondered something. “It took me all day and three contacts to find our new location here at the Ritz Regalia,” Buck interjected looking at the peeling wallpaper, and rotting walls behind them. “How in hell did you---“

“---Special Clearance,” Mildred interjected. She turned to Michael. “So how is the Housepainter doing?”

Michael related information about the Third Reich. Some of it unexpected, most of it horrifying. Most of it delivered to Mildred. Though her rank was only a Luitenant in the Navy, she clearly was in command of admirals and generals, and perhaps even called the shots with ‘Winny’ himself. As a communications officer, information and mis-information would go through her. The latter was far more effective, of course. Buck was a ‘look them straight in the eye’ kind of guy. Mildred was a no-bullshit patriot, one of the ‘good guys’. But what about Michael? There was something too comfortable and collected about him. Maybe it was the fact that, Buck White surmised, he was working for BRITISH intelligence as his job, American Intelligence by contract. Indeed, as he talked more openly, his diction took on a cocknied accent which put his roots, or dwellings, somewhere in the better neighborhoods around Liverpool.

There was one central fact to the good guys vs. bad guys thing. For the moment, Hitler was the bad guy. Everyone else was defined as a ‘good guy’ according to how effective or trustworthy they were in putting the Housepainter behind bars or into a bloody grave. As for the immediate agenda, there was the matter of Karen.

“It has been confirmed by all reliable sources, that she will be the mother of Hitler’s child,” Michael stated, providing evidence of such. Consistent with Wilhelm’s information.

“This wasn’t part of the plan in Washington or Camp X in Canada,” Buck said, as if apologizing for everyone over or under him across the Pond. “Karen Lubinska was supposed to infiltrate the Nazi High Command as a guest Bolshevik. An escaped, turncoat American with an axe to grind against the Red, White and Blue.”

“Who put her in jail for a murder she didn’t commit,” Michael interjected. “Because she was a Communist. The Brits listened to their Communists, you, Buck, framed them!”

The accusations were irrefutable. Buck couldn't argue against them. But the matter at hand was Hitler, for everyone.

"You are sure that she didn't abort the child?" Buck asked Michael.

"Positive," his firm and seemingly caring reply.

"Mother and child are still alive?" Mildred inquired.

"Yes."

"Where?" Buck pressed.

"We think, somewhere on the Russian front, in the Northwest region of what used to be the Ukraine," Michael related, taking a puff out of a Chesterfield, the first American cigarette to pleasure his mouth in over a year. "A godless stretch of grasslands, mud and ice that's very much become the Wild, Wild East."

"Quite," Mildred stated, her voice even, her eyes imagining the horror for any living human, or animal, in that once-bucolic portion of the world, as she remembered it before 1917.

"There's a price on the baby's head," Michael continued. "Ten thousand Marks to any German."

"Or Russian," Mildred interjected, amplifying Buck's fears even more. "Ten thousand Marks can buy even Stalin's Generals the kind of life they could never earn or be granted in the USSR."

"What about the price on Karen's head?" the 'non-existent' American agent asked.

"Her corpse, you mean," Michael stated in stiff upper-lip collection. The kind that Mildred shared as well.

When cornered by brawn, it's time to use brains. So went the training manual at Camp X, and everywhere else that did its job. "Rumor has it that Hitler is sterile. That he has one testicle," Buck offered.

"Rumors about Hitler are true or false, depending on what we want people to believe. Or what he wants people to believe," Mildred stated.

"And if the Third Reich has a male heir..." Buck imagined the horror of it all.

"Born to a Jewish Bolshevik?" Michael challenged.

"Who is blonde, blue eyed, and Aryan in every feature the Housepainter and his wretched myth creators consider important," Mildred noted.

"With a...super brain. Like her mother."

"And my ex---, still..." Michael's eyes released a flood of tears. It wasn't quite 'proper form' but even Winny had to release his real feelings or else blow up inside, or blow himself up.

Mildred handed Michael a hankerchief. The still 'Christmas uniformed' Buck twirled the golden lockes upon his head, juggling the string of imitation pearls around his Adam's apple like a pair of worry beads. Should he or shouldn't he? Another level of 'clearance' for Michael on the American side would entitle the Commie Yank to get the goods on Washington, feeding information to Stalin himself. But, soon enough, Stalin would have to be worked with, and to a functional extent, trusted. The tales of the concentration camps under Hitler were far worse than any news coming out of Stalin's Russia. But

Michael was an American, and/or Englishman, before he was a Communist. In any case it was time, for party and country differences to be set aside. It was the good guys against the bad guys.

“Let me know what you need from me to find her, and the child,” Buck said to Michael, and only Michael.

“So we can all move back to Brooklyn after the War?” the teary-eyed American Bolshevik smiled.

“As long as it’s not in my neighborhood,” Buck slurred out, offering his hand in friendship.

CHAPTER 31

For Karen, it was just another day on the trail a safe distance from the sounds of the guns to the haunted places between the killing grounds. Another day of the always-in-control Yankee Socialist Activist felt even more lost, and confused. Another day where North, South East and West could still be not reliably determined, how far from home or the final destination even more uncertain, now bordering on irrelevant. Another day when she woke up to breakfasts that filled her stomach delivered by two men who grew thinner by the mile, yet said they were not hungry. Another day when her tattered urine-stained peasant-boy’s attire was being replaced by ‘minimally blood stained’ skirts, blouses and even handkerchiefs

with flowers on them. Another day when she was realizing something else about being a woman, the 'heaviness' and vulnerability of bearing a child.

The soft grasses of summer had long ago yielded to the mud of fall, and the hard winds of winter. The soft snow of early winter solidified into a thin layer of crusted ice on top of every inch of ground. Not even a field mouse could keep going without leaving a track traceable by a hungry wolf. The horses' fetlocks developed ice cuts, the legs above them going lame. Cold snow, potions from Yolinki's medicine bag and private offerings to Buddha from the Siberian horseman were the only things keeping the animals alive. He seemed to care for the animals more than people, or even himself, though even the misanthropic Yolinki knew that the faithful steeds would have to become meat unless some kind of winter haven was found, fast.

The village of Kelevika, always another 100 kilometers away. It had everything Wilhelm needed, so he kept insisting. Its occupation force was clearly Soviet, but Wilhelm knew its Commander, Minkovic, all too well, from his boyhood days on the Eastern Front when it was a 'simple' War of the Kaiser fighting the Czar.

"Minkovic serves Mother Russia, after he serves himself," Wilhelm noted, in English for Karen, then in Russian for Yolinski from the next overlook, more char than trees, but some buildings below still standing.

The Mongolian Buddhist Dissident remembered Major Minkovic all too well. So many of his roommates at the Gulags, some enemies, some converts, but all, in the end, true Comrades, spoke of the Opportunist who came up smelling like a rose every time Stalin turned someone's truth into pure bullshit.

But Karen needed food, and Wilhelm needed parts for the radio.

"I'll stay here, with Yolinki," Karen offered.

"Not possible," Wilhelm affirmed, his head brewing with a plan, a real one that would work, this time. "We both have to talk to Churchill. And Mister White."

"He told me he'd fire me if I every got pregnant."

"He didn't know you would promote yourself by getting in trouble with The Trouble maker himself." He turned around, "You still have a job, he promised me."

"When?" Karen pressed. "When did he promise YOU a job?"

"Twenty villages ago," Wilhelm admitted. "Or maybe it was twelve."

"Or ten?"

"Perhaps." Wilhelm was caught, perhaps by his own masochist, or sadistic, design.

"What did he say?"

"That you and that thing inside you are going to live, whether you want to or not!"

"It's a child."

"It's our way out of this Goddamn, self-destructive, ignorant, stone-age country!" Wilhelm asserted. "And it may be the only hope the Allies have of ending the war before the Housepainter takes over YOUR country!"

"You mean?---"

“It has been five months since you have been pregnant, In another month, the ‘child’ will have a brain, and, according to some, a Soul. Or maybe you can hear what it’s thinking already.”

Karen looked to her belly, enlarging, becoming visible under her tattered, once oversized, dress. “I talk, But he—or she---still isn’t listening. Maybe it’s as stubborn as I am.” She swayed in the saddle, again. Yolinki dismounted, pulling her off the horse, laying her on the ground.

“What’s happening?” she muttered, coming back out of unconsciousness.

“Doctor. Karen need Doctor, Food, Fire”, the Siberian horseman said, with his best English and mime.

“You are Doctor,” she replied in Russian, her hand shaking. “You best doctor.”

Yolinki shook his head ‘no’. She knew he meant it, but didn’t want to.

“And we need another radio, “ Wilhelm related, knowing the limitations of his technological skills, and the limitless ability for Italian-designed radios made with Russian parts to give way. “And a way out of this sector, and the help of some good people we can trust, or bad people we can buy,” Wilhelm related. He pulled out his knife, sharpening it on a stone, contemplating something thought of three villages ago, finally ready to implement.

“What are you doing?” Karen asked, watching Wilhelm approach her, holding the knife in his hand, waving it with a gentle swaying motion. “What the hell is he doing, Yolinski?”

Yolinki’s eyes met Wilhelm’s. They both nodded, a very firm, but subtle ‘yes’. But to what?

“What! What?” Karen asked, then pleaded, then begged as the spy-troll and giant-healer walked closer to her, edging her back into a tree, putting a rope around her arms, a gag around her mouth.

Yolinki pulled up her dress, looking inside. He nodded “yes, it’s time” to Wilhelm.

“Go ahead and do it!” Karen said, resolved to her fate. “Take the baby, if you need it. Serve him, or her, up to Hitler for breakfast. But kill me afterwards. Please.”

“Hardly what we had in mind, Blondy” Wilhelm said, smiling. With that he grabbed a handful of Karen’s four-foot long hair, still golden, and remarkably untangled and even clean.

“Shorter,” Yolinki grunted, pulling out his knife. He made an incision in the skin, or so it felt, just below the hairline. It felt, for real, like that Blackjack Pershing military trim just two inches below the scalp, in a pattern that was identical to her Uncle Irving, who went bald when he was 21, and continued to look 20 years older than his real age his entire life. “With the price on this Jewish demon-seed-bearing mother’s head now up to 100 Marks, we’re better off traveling with a bald man than a Blonde bitch.”

“We’ll save it for you, Miss Lubinska,” Wilhelm promised as he sniffed Karen’s long locks, admiring their color, fragrance, texture. His left eye seemed sad, lamenting what he had to do for...whatever cause he was still fighting for. His right eye, illuminated all too clearly by the sun, showed the inevitable result of the life he had chosen. “Do it, now!” the right ocular porthole commanded, accompanied by a nod to Yolinki.

Karen closed her eyes. “Hair grows back, right?” she told herself. “And if it doesn’t...” She panicked. After seeing countless burnt and mutilated bodies, of men, women, children and animals people once valued more than other people, she was terrified of losing her hair. Looking in the mirror, whenever there would be one, and seeing bald skin above the big baby blue eyes that got her so many compliments from lonely men, and sexually adventurous women. Never again would she be able to say

‘thank you’ for a compliment delivered to her for being a ‘blonde, blue-eyed bombshell’. Never again would she---

Her imaginations were brought to reality by a gunshot, followed by a barrage of men screaming, then, thundering hoofs of what seemed like a thousand horses---

Opening her eyes, gazing through the protective brush on the molehill of a ‘mountain’ to the plains below she saw something she hardly thought possible.

“Michael?” she gasped.

“Yes,” Wilhelm noted.

“Riding a horse like it’s a donkey,” Yolinki commented with a chuckle, his knife back inside the leather sheath, his mind indulging in that most luxurious of emotions, feeling safe.

Feeling the hair still on the sides of her head, Karen looked closer. Yolinki was right. Michael rode in front of the band of Cossacks with a proud face and what looked like a very sore ass. “Who’s that next to him?” She asked, noting a strong man, and strong leader, decked out like was an incarnation of Taras Bulba from days of yore, save of course the machine gun strapped to his back.

“I don’t know,” Wilhelm took a closer look with the spy glasses. “I don’t...”

He hesitated, then gave the spy glass to Yolinki. Caution, then terror infused his eyes again.

“What? What?” Karen asked. “Who is he?”

“We thought he was dead,” Wilhelm related in very German English.

“We did too,” Yolinki said in broken, but honest Russian, then English.

“Who?” Karen asked.

“Kulakov” Yolinki said, with pride. “Yes, Kulakov”, he repeated, with anger, rage and disappointment.

“A Cossack leader who was lost after the Civil War, then...”

“Then what?”

Wilhelm gave the binoculars to Karen. “Look at their hats.”

Karen adjusted the oculars, trying to get a close look amidst the herd of horses breaking from a collected trot to a lope, then a flat out gallop, their leader unsheathing his sword. Michael did the same, the tightness of his fist and unbridled ferocity in his face something Karen never saw, or imagined possible of him. “I don’t...”

“Their hats!” Wilhelm screamed through hushed breath as he broke camp, Yolinki gathering the horses, wrapping the leg of the lame mare, hoping she would remain ‘transportation’ for one more getaway before becoming food.

“Oh my...” Karen couldn’t continue as her jaw dropped.

“God?” Wilhelm continued. “That crucifix around his neck says the Cossack is a Man of God, but he’s fighting for---“

“---The father of my child,” Karen interjected.

“And so is Michael,” Wilhelm continued.

Karen confirmed the claim with a look at Michael’s fur hat. Indeed, the swastika was as clear as that on Kulakov’s. And when Michael pulled down the visor, he did it with pride. But for what purpose. “Where are they headed?” she asked. “And why?”

Yolinki pulled Karen aside, pointing her attention to a valley, hidden by trees, or so it seemed. Inside the bush were men dressed similar to Kulakov, boldly showing the Red Star of Stalin on their hats and tattered lapels on the garments that still could pass as coats. They came out to greet the mounted Cossacks with open arms, blood-stained Stars of David on many of them. “Jews, and other partisans fighting against the Germans.”

“Not for long,” Wilhelm noted, burying the last remains of the camp, counting the inventory to be sure everything was loaded on the saddles.

True to Wilhelm’s prediction, Kulakov struck the first blow, firing his machine gun into the first row of welcoming partisans. The rest of his men fired on the ‘defenders’ of the woodland community, housing men, women and children.

“What are they doing!” Karen screeched.

“Watch what HE’S doing,” Wilhelm said, pointing to Michael.

Karen watched as Michael withdrew his sword, riding towards the head off a what looked like the Camp Priest, or Rabbi. Around his neck was a Cross, and the Star of David. On his hat, a Red Star, worn by all Partisans who were defending the Motherland.

“He’ll save him.” Karen said. “Michael’s...undercover. DEEP under...”

Before Karen could complete her defense, it was severed with a single slash of Michael’s sword, taking off the head of the Priest, Rabbi and defender of Mother Russia.

“How could he...we’re both fighting for...”

Wilhelm took hold of Karen’s shoulder. Though firm, abrupt and with the ultimate sense of urgency, it had a quality of warmth, and even truth, that he never expressed to her. “In this War, it’s not important who we’re fighting for, but who we’re fighting against.”

“Why?” Karen wanted to ask. “How did Michael find us here?” She found herself thinking as she was put on top of the Gelding, Yolinki’s horse who he never let anyone ride. Then, when she turned around, something even more frightening came out of the bushes. It was a woman’s face, or so it seemed. From...what seemed like lifetimes ago. Yolinki aimed his rifle at the apparition. Wilhelm, with no time to draw his weapon, accepted what his fate would be with coolness and collection.

“Comrade ‘Major?’” he asked, not quite recognizing her uniform, but knowing the insignia.

“Elena,” Karen said, recognizing her eyes, and sardonic smile.

“Blondie,” Elena replied.

“Almost baldy,” the American expatriate looked to her protectors.

Elena walked her horse forward. “You look..” She patted her thinning belly.

“Well fed,” Karen said, gazing into the life in her womb. “Thanks to them.”

Wilhelm nodded his gracious acceptance with a Prussian bow, extremely ‘snappy’ and military. Yolinki put his hand together Hindu style, bowing in a manor that was considered Sacred Custom in his homeland, ignorant stupidity.

“Where are we?” Karen asked.

“Just 50 kilometers from NorthWest Ukraine. Stephan Bandara territory. A Ukrainian Nationalist who is fighting German and Soviet invaders, or even American Armies should they think they can tell him what to do.” Elena said. “You didn’t know that, with all of your schooling and breeding?”

Karen didn’t know exactly what Elena meant by schooling and breeding. Did she mean Columbia University in NY, Camp X in Canada, the Polytechnica Institute in Germany just before the Non-Aggression Pact was broken, or the Penal ‘College’ in Alabama? She DID know that whenever she asked Wilhelm where they were, he would deny knowing the location. Yolinki would always say ‘here where we always are’ as a Buddhist montra or ‘you couldn’t pronounce it’.

Remembering her Camp X days, Karen recalled the most important maxim. “When you don’t know what to do or say, listen hard, and discretely.” That was the easy part. The hard part--- “Be prepared to believe anything that’s true, or could be true.”

CHAPTER 32

The village of Jelinika was barely a spot on the map on anything issued to Karen in Camp X during the geography training in 1939, equally unknown from her course in Russian Studies at Columbia University back in 19... yes it was 1929. The year when the stock market crash came dumping down on in the United States of (Capitalist) Assholes, and a year before the ‘blackout’ of news from the Ukraine to anywhere.

The sky was blue, the air silent, the village in the process of...growth as the American expatriate ‘war whore’, the Red Army Commandress, the impish German ‘Einstein’ and the Asiatic horseman rode past the sign reading “Jelinka, population...growing again”. Shadowing above them, a bedsheet converted into a banner, decorations adorning the once-burnt trees which seemed to now come to life with twigs fashioned into flowers. Karen’s Ukrainian was as rusty as her Russian, but she could clearly make out the writing. “Merry Christmas, Comrades and Christians,” she noted. “I wonder why they didn’t include

Jews,” she contemplated, remembering that half of her cultural roots which made her colorful in New York, unmarriageable in Alabama, and killable in Germany. And here she was, a part-Jewess pregnant with Hitler’s baby.

It was a warm day, wind, sun and clouds collaborating to provide the humans under their influence a window of relief. Or so Yolinki mused to Karen, Elena and Wilhelm with a reverence based in fear, and hope. Looking at him, one would think him invisible. A foot taller than most men around him, several thermal levels of fire hotter behind the eyes than even the most dedicated soldier, partisan or black marketeer. His hands fit sabre, rifle and pistol like a glove, somehow, his cheeks perfectly chiselled in the manner of his Mongol and Tatar ancestors.

Karen found her eyes lingering on him in ways she thought not possible. “THIS is the Master Race, if anyone is,” she found herself thinking. “Perfect composure and poise, never flinching from duty. Always prepared for attack, prepared to protect, dedicated to serve even at the cost of...”

Karen’s roving fantasy was interrupted by a loud thud, Yolinki drawing his sabre with his right hand, a pistol with his left. To his right, the assailant. In Yolinki’s face, fear, seen up front and very personal.

“Bang?” said the boy on the ground aiming his stick at Yolinki again.

Yolinki took a deep breath, collected his thoughts, and perspectives. He adjusted his leggings, hiding, what Karen saw, as an evacuation of urine.

Wilhelm looked at the boy, barely 8, and asked him. “Do you know what we used to call boys in Germany who wanted grow up to be soldiers who shoot people?”

“No, Sir,” the boy replied.

“Stupid idiots,” Wilhelm’s screamed out at the boy, hoping to scare him into sanity.

The lad turned to the Commandress, something in her eyes earning his trust.

“Go home, grow up and learn to choose your enemies more carefully!” she commanded, insuring that the Soviet insignia on her uniform was well hidden.

The boy saluted to the Commandress, sensing that she had military authority, though there was no evidence of her being anyone at all except another Russian on the run.

“Go home, lad,” Wilhelm said, in a tone that was more fatherly than firm. “Please. Your orders are to think for yourself, from this day forward.”

The lad obeyed, marching back home, somewhere amidst the rubble being resurrected down the path, which was being converted back into a real street.

Elena nudged her horse on, conversing with Wilhelm in rapid German and Russian with vocabulary that Karen didn’t recognize, and a speed too fast to follow. But such seemed irrelevant anyway, as her gaze fell once again on Yolinki. Things started to fall into place now. Whenever they were under attack, it was Wilhelm who shot at the assailants, and Yolinki who orchestrated the retreat. Wilhelm clearly has many notches in his gun, but as for Yolinki---reviewing the record left no other conclusion. He had never shot at another human being, and when he did fire into a patrol, it was over their heads or at their feet. Never did he draw blood, and never, never did he face an enemy---face to face. Aside from the haircut he almost gave Karen, he seemed incapable of cruelty or, she shuttered to think---courage under

fire. True, he could think clearly under fire, but when brains were no longer an option, and balls were required to avoid being killed, or get others killed, would he 'stay the course'?

"Yeah, who am I to talk," the American ex-journalist, former-superspy, legendary whore, now knocked-up pawn in a game of 'hide the baby' said to herself, silently. "I used to put myself in the front line of striking workers when the American Army aimed machine guns at their heads in Pennsylvania and Ohio. I used to steal food for starving prisoners from armed guards in Alabama. I used to get German scientists to give up everything to do the right thing and work for us, the good guys, putting them on the boats headed for home while I stayed behind. I used to..." There were so many 'I used to's...' before she became mother to the child of the most infamous, or famous, person in the world. And now, she was 7 months pregnant, unable to even get her own breakfast! And dependent on so many others to deliver it to her.

"This is your fault, you son of a bitch" she said, silently, to the 'life' in her womb. "I could be out of here, back in a comfortable holding cell in Alabama, banging Cracker Red Neck idiots for extra cigarettes, an extra slab of meat for dinner, or a bottle of booze. Speaking of which, since you've been in there, I haven't had a single drink. Even in this fucking wasteland where vodka is easier to find than venison, veal or the meat of---"

"Shhh" Elena said, working her way to within a foot of Karen's mumbling lips.

"What...was I?" Karen replied.

"Mumbling, yes you were." Elena's tone sounded real, and caring, her delivery discrete. "I didn't understand what you were saying, but when you mumble people always assume the worst."

"Right, of course. Thank you."

The Commandress didn't say anything else, but she did answer with her eyes, aimed at the baby in the womb. "All K O?" she asked in English.

"Yeah," Karen replied, finding herself bonding with the part of the baby that was hers, and by heritage, her mothers, fathers, grandparents, and all of those in her past who were losers, but never Nazi's, or Bolsheviks for that matter. "All O K," she smiled back.

Upon riding into the village with her now trio of escorts, Karen saw what no American before her did. It was a cemetery, crosses being put on recently dug graves. But the graves had no bodies, the dates of death reading December, 1930, January, 1931, Easter Sunday, 1931, and so on. The names were being carved on wooden crosses, with clear note as to their ages.

Elena, sensing Karen's questions, delivered the answers. "Yes, half of those who died that winter were children. Hundreds of them here, thousands elsewhere. Comrade Stalin, or someone even worse, needed food elsewhere to build a Socialist Paradise, so all the food, horses, cattle or other 'resources' were confiscated, just as chill of fall hit the air in 1930. The fathers, priests and philosophers were sent to Goulags backs. The mothers, grandmothers, and aunts left to watch their children starve, and kill themselves afterwards."

"How many?" Karen found herself asking. "Not that even one child's death is tragic enough." The American mother-to-be gazed down at her womb, still carefully and discretely covered by the oversized coat, now pancho which was still miraculously free of lice or rat droppings. Though everyone in the streets of Jelinka was optimistically busy rebuilding the town, inspired by a banner on the flagpole which was clearly not the hammer and sickle, Karen's eye were on the mourners, burying mementos into the graves. She had to ask another question.

"The bodies of the children."

“Lost, eaten by the wolves, or by rats that walk on two legs. Some by mice, or men who...” Yolinki replied. He held back her tears. Delaying that mourning process for, if he was lucky, the time of his own dying. That time when he hoped, and on a good day believed, he would transpire into an incarnation to a kinder world, perhaps even the Realm Beyond the world that his Master, and friend, Buddha claimed as the destination for all Souls. Remembering tales too horrific for anyone to forget, and too ghastly for anyone to write down, he continued. “Flesh is flesh, and if the Soul leaves the body, those who remain, who SHOULD remain, must do what they can to survive.”

Karen gazed again at the graveyard, its boundaries expanding with every new group of Ukrainian Nationalists filtering into the village. One in four came to the graveyard before reporting to the Commander in Charge at a desk in front of the recently-reconstructed Church. Men, women and even those legally-called children in her home country. Some missing limbs, others without an eye (or two), others crippled for life between the ears in ways that no surgeon or even Messiah could repair. “How many?” Karen asked. “In 1931?”

Wilhelm provided his speculation, based on fact. “A third died of hunger, frostbite or disease here. A third were deported. And a third---”

“---Will not accept this from ANYone again,” Elena interjected, spurring her horse into a trot, pointing to their destination behind the Church, and a few hundred yards from the newly-established brothel. The face of the Comandress who never gave her last name never showed what she was really feeling, or thinking. Not even when another supply wagon was torn up to make more crosses for the graveyard. Not even when more supply wagon brought in wounded, terrified and rage-infested deserters from the Red Army who had torn off their Red Stars, inserting the Ukrainian insignia in its place, some of those deserters still looking very Soviet behind eyes. Not even when the Mastress of the brothel winked at Elena, asking with her eyes if she preferred her special services, an offer which was not refused.

“So,” Wilhelm said, gazing into Elena’s eyes, and the Mastress of the ‘hotel’ in which he seemed interested in renting a room. “In Germany you and she would have hung, slowly. I suppose that in the New Russia, you are required to allow us to watch.”

“While YOU hang, you ugly, troll, son of a bitch,” Elena replied.

“Hmmm”, Wilhelm reflected. “Accurate on all counts, but not quite right.”

“Nothing has been ‘right’ since 1932,” Elena related as she passed a pile of manure. She halted the horses, opened her coat, and tore off the Red Star on her uniform. Throwing it into the pile of crap, she smiled.

Karen noted that it was the first time she saw the Commandress smile. But then, Elena’s lips began to quiver, her teeth chattering.

“Are you alright?” Karen asked.

“Of course, now,” delivered through Elena’s gritted teeth.

Karen felt it necessary to open up the most dangerous and needed can of worms...hope. “Maybe after all of this is over, I could go back to being a journalist for readers who actually can read, and think. You, Yolinki can raise ponies.”

“---Stallions, and mares. Arabian for the Mongolian desert,” he dreamed behind his tired eyes.

Turning to the mis-shaped, grubby, super-intellect German who was now fighting against the ‘Master Race’, she continued. “Wilhelm, you can open up your own whore house---”

“---Entertainment establishment, for gentlemen, and ladies” he smiled.

“And you, Elena,” Karen turned her head. “What did you do before...all of this.”

“I was an actress,” Elena said, with a warm smile that was very convincing, and frightening. The town tower bell rang, more of a clank than a ring, announcing the noon hour. Adopting her current ‘role’, Elena snapped her back from a relaxed curve into rigid attention, nudging her horse forward, her bearing relating to everyone that it was time to get back to the business.

What that business was still remained elusive to Karen as they turned the corner to the shacks being converted into houses, with new additions not seen since that fateful winter of 1930. Walls on all sides, doors that opened from both sides and even, yes, roofs. She remembered the two rules of journalism. First, let people tell their own stories. Second, actors always know how to tell the kind of stories that you want them to write. And third, never believe anything you read, even when you wrote it.

CHAPTER 33

January lasted into February in London, the snow holding onto its water, conferring to the air a biting chill which permeated like rain. Buck White entered his office, taking the ever-changing route from his flat as a matter of added security. Removing his coat, retaining his sweater and wool shirt, blowing foggy air into his aching fingers, he gazed at his desk. Apparently, he was just issued a new devise to communicate his latest data, wrapped on his desk with a birthday bow.

“A telephone, Mildred?” he noted.

Mildred, the secretary with no Surname who still commanded more Knights in the UK than most men even dreamed about, set her papers in place. “Yes, I’ve received a new typewriter as well.” She put the devise down on her desk, smaller and lower than White’s. All paperwork went into its normal place, except for one thing. The decoder machine in the corner, made to look like a children’s hole puncher to the casual observer. The communicative devise that Mildred worked so well, and exclusively.

“What’s with the code machine?” White asked.

“It’s feeling rather under the weather,” Mildred said, heating up some cold water to as hot as possible over a candle-flamed heater, arranging crumbs from the bakery into something resembling scones and breakfast bisquits. “With you Yanks in it now---“

“---Finally, thank God”, White interjected.

“It looks like we’ll need to expand our security networks.” Mildred sipped the water. “Hmmm, almost ready for tea,” she commented. “Try one of these crumpets. Small, but it keeps our figures trim, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, indeed,” White acknowledged, helping himself to a rationed English portion of the pastry, a breadcrumb by American standards. And he was still American. White always felt he, and his country, were kept one step behind what the Brits really knew. “Expand your security systems?” he asked.

“Our security systems,” Mildred smiled back. “We are in this together, Sir.”

Mildred’s smile seemed sincere, but she never seemed otherwise. The assignment sheets given to White said what she couldn’t, or wouldn’t.

“I’m being promoted?” he noted.

“We’ll need you to liasson between your American Agents and our British Agents, and roughing out the administrative edges as your military personell come across the pond, Sir..” Pointing to the phone she continued. “You have a way with words, Sir, and how you say something in your new position is far more important than what you say.”

White cracked a smile. “You want me to keep our American boys, and Einsteins, from getting drunk at your pubs, making empty marriage proposals to your women and to teach your musicians what Dixieland jazz is really supposed to sound like?”

“Yes, and more, Sir.” Mildred said with civil graciousness, and a mild chuckle. Keeping that expression frozen, she handed him a list of names, three pages worth. He recognised some from Camp X, some from the back pages of the New York Times.

“All of these people are my responsibility?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. In keeping with your promotion, Sir.”

White always distrusted people who called him Sir too many times. Use of that term once was a sign of respect. Twice or more reflected someone who didn’t respect himself, or you. And Mildred lacked no self esteem. Or maybe it was manipulation. Everyone who knew White was aware of his ambition to be in position of power and influence. He was always three steps lower than his real ability. From the days of being second string offensive lineman on his High School football team back in Waco, Texas, to having to cowntow to the morons in Washington who, in 1938, claimed that Hitler would be content with Czechoslovakia and Austria.

White looked at Mildred’s face as she explained the details of his new position, and elevated Military rank to go with it, of course. His ears listened to names, numbers, locations and code words for the list of special agents he was now responsible for helping, watching, and manipulating. But he didn’t concern himself so much with who was one of the good guys or bad guys on the list, but what Mildred, and by inference, ‘Winny’ Churchill, really intended with his promotion. Mildred’s eyes remained fixed in position with every word, or seemed to move to the upper right and lower left. Both were the inevitable reflexes of someone who was lying. Yet, Mildred’s heart was in the right place, he still felt. The data was real, and the promotion very legitimate, and needed for a successful War effort. They were very powerful

people, or potential puppets, on White's list. Some were known to the public, such as Joseph Kennedy, Charles Lindbergh, two Admirals in the British Command, five high ranking Americans at the Pentagon Army, including a hothead known as Patton and an up and coming General who had never seen battle, affectionately called 'Ike'. Scientists like Oppenheimer, Neisser and even Old Al Einstein. The Agents, of course, would not be known until well after WW4, assuming the world would survive to experience such an event.

It was not so much who was on the list but who wasn't. "Shroeder and Lubinska," White politely stated. "They aren't on my list."

"And these people are..."

"Wilhelm and Karen!" White found himself screaming with the kind of passion he told his agents never to reveal to anyone, even themselves. "Why aren't they on my list?" he continued, in a more collected tone.

"They are..." Mildred couldn't say it. Her cheeks swelled up, but her face remained dry.

"Expendable?" White asked.

"Not assigned to you, Sir," Mildred sprang back to 'stiff upper lip' tone.

"And Wilson?"

"Malcolm Wilson? I seem to recall that he IS on..."

Mildred pursed the list, her memory not quite up to snuff.

"MICHAEL Wilson," White stated.

"Hmmm..." Mildred replied, searching the names. "An interesting omission," she noted. Buck knew when to shut up, and when to listen. "Interesting Omission" wasn't the kind of answer he was looking for. Maybe Mildred was confused, or maybe she was hiding something again.

In any case, Buck White was being promoted, finally! He would have little time to deal with insignificant American Communists such as Michael and Karen, and impish romantic black marketers like Wilhelm. And as for that matter of Karen being pregnant with Hitler's baby...IF she was still Alive, there were babies dying everywhere. And the rumor about her being alive may not have been true at all. In peace time, no news is good news. During war, no news usually meant that the person on the other side of the line was dead, or worse.

CHAPTER 34

“War is hell,” Karen remembered from the school books quoting General Sherman, a hero if you were rooting for the North, a War Criminal if you were a Southerner who earmarked the Civil War as the “War of Northern Aggression”. “Long periods of boredom punctuated by brief periods of terror,” was Karen’s experience of it in her new dwelling, nearly-windowless ‘safe house’ with nothing on the walls except an Eastern Orthodox crucifix, a portrait of Saint Vladimir who looked so miserable that he seemed to welcome the opportunity to be a sinner, and a bullet scraped, but not busted, Grandfather clock. It ticked louder with every minute, hour, day, week and month. Interrupted by the occasional thunder of not-too-distant artillery fire, and the unannounced cavalry charge of Nazi or Red Army troops who always came when you least expected, their defeat at the hands of Jeninka’s Home Guard, just in time, so many times.

The village of Jelinka was far cry from the Big House in Alabama, but from where Karen stood, or sat, or on a weak day, laid down, it bore striking similarities. Winter lingered, blue skies above heralding in a chill to the rising sun, morning frost covering the rooftops, a hore frost on the trees on the hills surrounding the town. For reasons that neither the bush-trained Yolinki nor the Moscow-educated Doctor assigned to her could determine, the stronger the baby got, the weaker his, or her, carrier became. The American ‘war whores’ shapely legs swelled with fluid, every joint in them aching with pain.

“Mrs. Lubinskov” was her new name, conferred by Elena, who seemed to care more than she should have. The ‘ski’ was converted to ‘kov’ just in case Ukrainians who were bitter about the Polish occupation of Kiev of 1920 were still mulling around. The “Mrs” was added by ‘Illya the Inevitable’, the simple-minded owner of the house that was rebuilt the way his family, now deceased, or worse, would have wanted it. To Illya, everyone who was pregnant was a ‘Mrs’, every son born to a loving mother, every father loyal to his wife, and family. According to the local gossip, the always-smiling, ninety-pound weakling Illya was too dumb, weak or useless for deportation to the labor camps back in the LAST ethnic purge, 1931, as was recalled. Another story was that he was kept alive while everyone else in the village was ‘re-assigned’ because he kept the food-stealing Red Army at that time entertained.

Illya didn’t talk much, barely three words a day. But he did speak, through an instrument miraculously preserved. As he used that instrument of communication, he rocked, hummed and rolled his eyes as if he saw an entirely different universe than any that ‘smart’ or ‘normal’ people did.

By necessity, Karen learned to like the music he played on the piano, for two hours a day. If indeed it could be called music. Most of the time it was just sounds, tones or a series of notes not held together by anything Karen’s ear recognized as a melody, the emotion of pain infiltrating even the ‘happy’ notes. But within it, there were passages of something she could recognize. Sometimes it was Bach. Sometimes that Russian guy who wrote Swan Lake. Sometimes Mozart, Beethoven or even Wagner, German composers who the German-hating Ukrainians outside seemed to like. But most of the time it was annoying noise, as annoying to the ears as those ever-repetitious hillbilly ‘Folk Songs’ were toxic to the brain back in ‘Alabami’. Still, Illya’s ‘musical rants’ were a welcomed break from the ticking of the clock, and the silence, and the lack of conversation from Wilhelm, Yolinki and even Elena.

It was already two hours past the time when the always punctual Wilhelm made his now twice weekly rounds with food, water and the most valuable of nutrients, a book. Most of them were half charred, pages held together by blood, and in languages Karen could hardly read, but recognizing a word here and there kept her going as the eight month in what seemed like and eight year pregnancy was coming to a close. Karen’s worry escalated to terror when there was a knock on the door. A loud forceful one this time, unlike that of Wilhelm, Elena or even a frustrated Yolinki.

“I’ll get it!” Illya sprang up from his piano stool, a converted toilet, and raced to the door. “I’ll get it!” the thirty-something boy continued with a dance in his step, shining happiness in his eyes.

Karen hid behind the wall, wondering why Illya forgot to look through the slot first, or forgot to ask who it was, or forgot that he pledged to Saint Vladimir that he would never answer the door without seeing who was on the other side first.

Just before getting to the door, Illya stopped, his face turning catatonic. The door knock got louder, pushing Illya deeper and deeper into that memory, and nightmare.

Karen peaked outside. The streets were empty, the visitor at the door hidden from view, his face not visible from any of the ‘secret holes’ Elena had put into the house. Whoever he was, he knew how to stay unidentified. But he was well armed, carrying a backpack filled with equipment Karen didn’t recognize.

Another knock at the door thrust Illya back to something he never said in words, or perhaps even music. He mumbled something in Ukrainian, in the voices of some people old, some people young, some male, some female. All the ‘characters’ were terrified, and terrifying.

Karen sneaked another look outside, this time through a ‘special hole’ made by Yolinki. The visitor was alone, whoever he was, standing tall, fearless and confidently. “Michael?” she thought, and feared. “Or...” If the worth of a woman is measured by the greatness and number of her enemies, Karen was a rich girl. And now that she was a “Mrs”, there was no shortage of unknown enemies who would join that number, the bounty of seventy-thousand Marks making her a Mark for ANYone in a War which had

become about survival and safety rather than ideology. Or, if she was lucky, ideology gone perverted, which at least had some nobility in it.

Another knock silenced Illya. His arms were frozen, his legs rigid, his eyes fixed on something inside his very active brain.

Assessing the odds, Karen looked at her now very larged belly. "It's two against one," she noted. "A piece of cake, right?" She pulled out the reserve luggar stuck inside her stocking and checked the magazine. It was...empty! Who could have emptied it? The candidates raced through her head. Since we was in a 'motherly way', her sleeps had become sound, perhaps too sound. Any one of her protectors could have taken it from her, for whatever reasons. Perhaps to prevent her from getting into a fight she couldn't win. Perhaps to prevent her from killing the baby. Perhaps to prevent her from killing herself. Seeing no other alternative, she grabbed hold of a new addition to the house---a Crimean War single-shot rifle under the portrait of Saint Vldadmir. Its stock was cracked, its barrel probably empty, any round inside it more likely to kill the shooter more than the shootee. But if it was held with enough courage, conviction and confidence, or so she told herself as her hands shook and her teeth chattered.

Another knock on the door brought Illya back to 'reality', if one could call his life that. Color restored to his face, flexibility to his limbs, a village-idiot smile to his lips, Illya the Inevitable did the unthinkable, opening the door, and bowing to the unseen visitor on the other side. "Welcome," he said...in actual words, and a language Karen least expected.

"Welcome to you, too," the man behind the door repeated, in AMERICAN English, with a familiar twang.

"Tex?" Karen asked, holding the gun at the visitor's heart, terrified to look into his eyes.

"In the flesh, Ma'am," the visitor replied, opening up his coat, revealing an American Air Force uniform under it, his name clearly displayed.

"Tex..." Karen did her best to read the tag, but her vision had deteriorated, along with every other body system below he neck, so it seemed.

"You gonna let me in, or we gonna yap out here all day?" the American pilot who Karen worked with, and connected to, way back in...yes, it had only been 1939. The firmly muscled, bright-eyed Texan hadn't changed a bit, his newly-grown mustache in a style akin to both Stalin and the Cossacks who fought with, or against, him. "I got a present for ya, Ma'am."

Karen now recognized what was on his back. A radio, or parts that could be put together to make one, with a fresh, clearly designated source. "Camp X issue," she said silently. "Buck White made us put those things together in the dark, in less than a minute, or our asses were---"

"--Ma'am," Tex interjected, motioning his head towards an oncoming band of Cossacks, without any insignia, riding down the road past the farm house, stopping to consult a map of some sort. "I hid my horse in the barn," he continued, "And we have some things to yap about." He looked straight at Illya. "How do you figure in all of this!!!" he blasted at Illya in Russian.

Smiling, Illya danced back to his piano and began to play. The tune was...all too familiar.

"Yellow Rose of Texas", Karen noted. She twirled her hair, still thick, still long and still, miraculously, blonde.

Tex entered, shaking the mud off his boots. Karen looked down.

"Cowboy shit-kicker boots, Ma'am," Tex noted.

“Make you stick out here like a sore thumb,” she replied, closing the door behind him. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. How she had aged, in her hips, arms, face, chin and eyes. How Tex hadn’t. Or so was the perception of her blurry, and hopefully inaccurate vision. “And it’s Karen.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” the Texas flyboy said to the woman who had seen far more than Buck White’s travel brochure promised, or threatened.

Tex strolled to the table, opening up his pack, a collection of wires, metal and receivers that were very much smaller than standard issue, even by Camp X standards.

“Does it work?” Karen asked, as Illya’s music became fragmented into more noise than notes. It was hard on the ears, but kept the conversation un-interpretable for anyone else around the window, so she thought.

“Think so.” Tex reached into his crotch.

Karen smiled, recalling that friend who hadn’t visited her in a long, long time---humor.

The joke was short lived, Tex pulling out a piece of paper stinking of sweat from his family jewels, and ONLY sweat. “For you to memorize now, Ma’am.”

Karen strained to read the codes, names and ‘contact language’ to be used. The latter was a dialect of pig Latin and street WAP, mixed in with some Spik Barrio language which was uniquely American, standard Camp X. “Virgin whore,” she read.

“Your contact name,” Tex said. “Karen,” he continued, realizing that she needed to be reminded of who she once was, or could be.

“And Buck White’s is...” reading it, the words brought home more than what she wanted to be reminded about. “Frame Maestro”.

Looking at Tex, Karen wondered if he knew about how Buck White needed a scapegoat for the murder of those Cops after the Workers Strike in outside Phillie was settled. And the vicious murders of the tycoons at the Waldorf afterwards. After, of course, an unreported number of Workers, presumably Anarchist Communists, were relieved of their lives as well as their jobs. And the ‘trial’ where she was accused of being an Anarchistic Communist, a charge she denied due to its ideological impossibility. “Communists are organized,” she glibly and affirmatively told the judge, to which Buck pushed for another issue, and inquiry. “HOW are they organized, Comrade Lubinski?” No matter what her answers were they, would not be enough and she would be guilty of every charge the Red Scared US Justice Department saw fit to throw upon her, and the hot shot federal prosecutor who was now her boss, perhaps friend.

“My country right or wrong” Tex seemed disinterested in what Karen was, or did. Though a bloody stain on humanity, it was a clean slate now, political prisoners selectively freed by Stalin to fight for Mother Russia, and discretely liberated by FDR to prove their worth to Lady Liberty. For the moment, Reds were welcomed Comrades to the Red, White and Blue.

“Does Buck know about---“ Karen pointed to her belly. “Of course he does,” she interjected as Tex helped himself to another potato on a dinner table that was, for better or worse, as stocked with nutrition as any in Dallas, New York or Switzerland.

“When?” Tex asked. Tex shooed Illya away from the kitchen, motioning that the pigs outside needed feeding. Being the work horse that he was, Illya gleefully obeyed.

“The doctors here tell me in about a month,” Karen said to Tex, swallowing slowly so another round of nausea wouldn’t weaken her even more.

“And what do YOU say, Agent Lubinska.”

It had been so long since anyone had called Karen ‘Agent’. So long since she was given that acknowledgement, respect and trust. So long since she was assigned any work besides holding onto an eight pound baby-something that could be a bargaining chip for the highest, or smartest bidder.

She looked at the radio, now assembled. “For MY ears and mouth only?” she asked.

“Correct, Agent Lubinska.”

“It’s small, but...” she looked around the room. “I think I can hide it inside the bed.”

“Or someplace even more private, Ma’am”. Tex’s finger politely pointed to Karen’s crotch. “We took measurements, Agent Lubinska. It should still fit in there.”

Karen confirmed the dimensions with her fingers, inserting the device as directed. It fit snugly into her vagina, tighter than any birth control device designed by even the Free Choice anti-abortionists. Buck White knew so much about her, in very intimate ways. For all she knew, he could have been one of those private visitors in the Alabama Pen during that week when she was doped up. Punishment for trying to organize that hunger strike for rights of White AND Colored inmates. Or so she pondered while munching on a carrot, a vegetable that presumably was good for the eyes.

The meal finished, the instructions delivered, the unanswerable questions not answered, Tex rode into the sunset, at a walk, trot, then lope. It was a magnificent sunset, the colors reminding Karen of those special times back in New York, with Michael, and a few others. Brilliant colors that couldn’t be hidden by anything, even New Jersey soot. Violating the ‘don’t go out before dark’ curfew, she walked outside, smelled a spring flower, and watched the Texas flyboy leap over the plains of what was truly the Wild, Wild East. It was a picture book story, as he faded into the sunset. As the colors merged with four other horses following his steed on the now-fenceless Steppes. As riders emerged from those horses. As five shots were fired. As all the horses went off in their own direction, rider-less.

CHAPTER 35

It would have been an easy decision for a simple man. A difficult one for one who was not. A practical one for a man who defined practicality and justice by an ever changing standard which seemed consistent only to himself.

“We should shoot them where they stand!” Elena whispered from the tree branch above a gutted Church which was now used as an Officer’s Mess by the German Army, entertained by a special guest chef.

“Not yet,” Yolinki replied. “The cook isn’t finished serving the meal. It smells delicious.” Indeed, Yolinki’s stomach was growling. Though his ammo belt was rich in bullets, his belly was as empty as his faith in ANY political system or religion. Even Buddhism failed him now. If Buddha was still Alive, he was deep asleep. His Eastern religion frowned upon eating of animal flesh, but during his ‘Socialist’ education at the Gulag in the North, North WEST corner of the USSR, he learned just how far a good piece of meat could go to keep a man alive. And the roast...whatever...in the ‘Pit House Dining Hall’ was cooked to perfection, served up by the hunch-backed cook who blabbered in non-sense to Officers who delighted in his culinary skills and speech deficits.

“Your friend Wilhelm makes a good Untermench,” Elena commented. “But he doesn’t look like he’s getting any useful information from those Nazis.”

“Maybe it is because they are Germans, not Nazis?” Yolinki speculated. He lowered the site on his machine gun, helping himself to a wider view of the congregation. They seemed human, young, innocent, somehow. Worthy to listen to, not to kill. And certainly not to capture. He knew all too well what kind of fate would await them at any Labor Camp. “We must remember why we are here.” the still-thinking and still Buddhist ‘re-educated’ Bolshevik asserted.

“To kill Germans,” Elena sneered, aiming at Wilhelm’s head.

Yolinki froze with terror. Was this war turning even level-headed Commanders who survived the Stalinist Purges into raging lunatics out for blood and the immediate satisfaction of revenge?

She cocked the hammer on her weapon, squeezing the trigger, slowly. “It’s us against them, my friend. Us against, Hitler, Stalin and any other money-grubbing opportunist who wants to take over our country, and lives. And once a turn-coat, always a turncoat, my friend.”

Maybe Elena was right. Wilhelm always said that the war was about survival, and money. The black marketer always seemed comfortable in his dealings with anyone, and his belly was always fed. He claimed it was to keep up his strength, or that he had a ‘Buddha belly’ that was overfed with Bavarian sausage when he was a child. But the fact was that Wilhelm DID turn against his own country. Or did he?

“Well, my friend, Yolinki.” Elena said, taking aim at his testicles. “Our friend Wilhelm said he would have obtained the information we needed by now. It’s a lot later than now, now. So, now we have to---“

“---Give him another ten minutes,” Yolinki interrupted. He never interrupted anyone. Always found ways around orders rather than directly disobeying them. Punctuating his insistence, he lifted up his gun, resting it on the branches around him.

“We shoot everyone down now!” Elena insisted, taking aim at the Officer of highest rank.

“We wait!” Yolinki countered, aiming his weapon at Elena’s head.

She shrugged, rolled her eyes, shook her head in pity, then...laughed, inviting him in on the joke.

Yolinki didn’t know what was funny, but tried to find the humor in whatever made Elena do the right, and effective thing. Madness worked out that way, so it seemed. There was no reason why some people survived the War of Stalin against his own people in the thirties and now this War against Hitler FOR Stalin in the forties. Some people were born with the dumb luck to have survival instincts, and some didn’t. It was just another one of those things that was. Like the fact that Yolinki never really had to face his moment of truth in Combat. He never had to kill a man. Life, or someone else, wound up killing his enemies for him.

Meanwhile, the Untermench cook exited the hall, pushing a piece of paper into his pockets. Sneaking out the back door, he climbed up the tree. Smiling at Elena, he presented the notes to her.

“They’re in Swedish!” she fumed.

“So they can be read by a neutral party,” he mused, rocking back and forth in a ‘Billy laugh’ which was as ugly as it was crude. Especially to ‘Lady Elena’, who aspired to the Upper Caste, and Class no matter how much she ranted on about the New Bolshevik Aristocratic class which, according to her, had no class at all. ‘Peasants with big penises and nothing inside them!’ she dubbed them. And Wilhelm seemed to fit right in, according to her private rants.

It was all confounding to Yolinki, who was trying to fight for the Mission at hand. And that Mission, as he understood it, was about a pregnant American woman carrying a maniac’s child left alone at a farm house with a village idiot. He wondered why so many ‘side missions’ came his way, particularly as the child was coming to term, and the price on mother and child was escalating by the month. He also wondered why Wilhelm and Elena seemed so much in agreement once the ‘Billy Buddha’ translated the note into Russian.

“What are our orders?” Yolinki asked, unable to read the print.

“To stay Alive,” Wilhelm ordered his Siberian Squire, and Good Luck Charm.

“And to trust nobody,” Elena added, turning her eyes away from her ‘friends’, and herself.

CHAPTER 36

Sweden was a quiet country, but not a peaceful one. Though the sun shone above, and the flowers bloomed in the garden, the faces of the people on the Street outside the King Gustav Café read ‘no win’. A German victory in Europe would certainly bring the Swastika to the country that declared its neutrality. An allied victory would yield the kind of guilt that would linger on for generations. But the banks were making money loaning money to both sides, and the newspapers were, all things considered, fairly accurate.

“So,” Buck White mentioned to his guest as he sipped his morning coffee gazing at the headlines, reading between the lines. “The Germans are on their way to capturing Stalingrad.”

“The Germans are on their way to catching flu, frostbite and dysentery. Their horses are belly-deep in mud and the Panzer Corp is running out of gas,” Michael Wilson replied with a lilting laugh. “The Russians are burning their own country down, using their people as human bullets and barricades. Shooting anyone who retreats or even thinks of surrendering,” he smirked. “We should celebrate.”

“Why?” White asked.

Wilson shook his head, adjusted the collar on his Swiss-tailored suit, replying in ‘Harvardese’, “It’s elementary, man. The longer Hitler and Stalin go after each other, the easier it is for us to bring democracy to Eastern Europe after they’ve destroyed it.”

“Yes,” White replied, cautiously. “Helping to bring democracy to destroyed countries can be profitable business.”

“Exactly!” the former Socialist replied. He raised his coffee in a toast. “To...democracy, Colonel White?”

“And profits, Comrade Wilson!” White countered.

The coffee tasted bitter, even though there were three cubes of sugar in it. Something about Wilson didn't feel right. True, he had 'escaped' again from the Fatherland with State Secrets that Churchill was quite pleased with. He was a hero, a legend amongst those who could never tell their stories to anyone. But, more importantly, he was Buck White's superior now.

“I want you to do something for me, Buck,” Michael said.

“Want?”

Wilson smiled, neglecting to use the 'order' word, but meaning it.

“What do you 'want' me to do?” the straight shooter from Texas asked the city slicker from, he presumed, the Big Hill in Bean Town, Mass.

“There's a friend of mine---”

“---Ours,” Buck blasted back.

“Of course, 'ours',” he smiled, with regret. That kind of smile that came with sorrow afterwards.

Buck didn't have to ask. Wilson knew more than he was telling.

“I hear she has a radio now,” Wilson said.

“Yes, I heard that too,” Buck said, looking into his coffee, stirring it pensively. “We hear a lot of things, but we never heard her call in anything on that radio.”

“You will report to me anything you hear on that radio, right?” Wilson said.

“IF she had a radio,” White replied, looking his new boss straight into the eye.

“IF you know what's best for her, and, you...” Michael replied.

Buck shook his head. How could a war of so much clarity get so muddled? It was supposed to be about the good guys fighting the bad guys to protect the innocent guys, and gals. And, if at all possible, gal.

Wilson put aside his strudel and pushed an envelope under White's disbelieving eyes. TOP SECRET. A Presidential Seal from Washington on it.

“Open it, please, Buck.”

To Buck's eyes the landscape seemed like his Uncle's farm in Iowa. Everything flat, agricultural, and treeless.

“The Ukrainian forest,” Wilson said. “Or what's left of it. In the last sector where she is.”

Buck's eyes lighted up. Finally, an assignment that meant something, from a strategic AND human perspective. A chance to bring the most famous War Whore and potentially-infamous bastard child to the United States to safety, and a position of possible bartering with Hitler and his Henchmen. Figuring all the angles, the plan was already being orchestrated in Buck's mind. With the radio Buck snuck in, communications could be established. Karen and child could get out of harm's way and, hey, if possible, she could even work her magic against Stalin and company. By the end of the War, she could become a

member of the OSS, working on Wild Bill Donovan's staff at the highest levels, fighting good wars against bad people for a noble country. White could be what he dreamed about being for years and years---a Civilian, maybe with a wife like Karen. The next best thing to having Karen as his wife. "You want me to bring her in." Buck smiled with delight.

"Not quite." Wilson replied. "I want you to get ME in."

Buck thought it a joke. But Michael wasn't laughing.

CHAPTER 37

Karen always wondered why it was called 'Good' Friday. The celebration of Jesus's crucifixion, betrayal and, according to all biological accounts, death. Such was the situation in 32 AD, and such as it seemed in 1942.

"Fuck! Why me!" she grunted through the pains in her belly which felt like nothing she ever experienced before. "What the fuck is going on!"

"It is miracle of childbirth," Illya the Inevitable said in a lilting, musical tone which made him the most beloved village idiot in any town he found himself 'adopted' by. "It is miracle of life," he continued, messaging Karen's rumbling abdomen with his left hand, cooling her sweat-soaked brow with a cold rag.

Yolinki prepared another batch of a special potion that helped more than one fourteen-hand short mare deliver an oversized foal in the middle of the Steppes. Wilhelm tried to put together the remnants of what seemed to be a radio he found in the chickenhouse, miniature in design, no doubt American built. Elena stood guard at the door like a mother hen, the very pregnant chick under her care in her second day of labor, very hard labor at that.

"Ahhhh!!!!" Karen screamed again, her stomach doing its best to barf out Yolinki's special potion which seemed to combine the worst flavors of every food the very pregnant ex-Bolshevik and perhaps still-American ever smell, tasted or was forced to swallow down to stay alive. "What the fuck is in this shit!" she screamed.

"Something you have to swallow," Yolinki said.

"I don't think so," she protested, her stomach seconding the motion with a volume of volcanic vomit with spilled across the room, splattering most heavily on Ivan. Licking the fluid off his lips it seemed to please him. The whole process there seemed to please him. The whole war, for that matter. The more misery was around, the happier he was. The more pain Karen experienced, the wider he smiled.

“Pain and pleasure. Same thing, Mrs. Lubinska,” he nodded with a fatherly assurance well beyond his years, and reproductive capacity.

“Yes,” Yolinki added.

“No...no...” Karen shot back. Then her face went blank. The pain disappearing, as rapidly as it came. “No. I can’t feel...”.

Inside of her, something died, or went dormant. “I can’t feel its...”

“Its what.”

“His heartbeat.”

“His?” Wilhelm noted, his eyes rolling with increasing dollar signs, the stakes in his head increasing, the possibilities for greater gain gaining fast.

Yolinki listened for his, her or ‘its’ heartbeat. Nothing. He knew it, and Karen knew it.

“Do what you have to do,” she said to Yolinki, in his Native tongue. A one word phrase that was spoken only on the High Plains well East of the Urals, North of China.

With tongue chanting Buddhist prayers, hands putting the sharpest knives in his saddlebag into boiling water, the process was set in motion. Karen noticed her hands crossing herself, asking the Catholic God of guilt, obedience or perhaps even love to bless the child, no matter what it was.

Wilhelm finally got the radio to work, only to get a drunkard at the other end whose dialect was un-interpretable.

“Who is it?” Elena asked.

“Probably one of ours,” Wilhelm lamented.

“One of ours...One of ours...” Karen heard echo through her head as she sniffed the ether smuggled out of Minsk by Elena, swallowed the powder given to her by Yolinki, and smiled somberly at Illya, who still sung his musical montra. “It miracle, Mrs. Lubinska. Is miracle.”

But Yolinki’s face said something different. One of those mother or child choices, she surmised, with little chance for either one. “Demon seed?” she asked Yolinki as her parting thought, and question.

“Seed,” his affirmative reply.

Once again, Karen sunk down into the abyss. She found herself regretting everything. Her life since exiting the womb was hardly as it was planned. A Socialist who was now fighting to save the life of the Nazi High Commander’s child. Which was, whether she liked it or not, her child, IF she was lucky.

CHAPTER 38

Karen was always a 'night' person. Dawn scared the crap out of her. Maybe it was because it was Light, or because it was the time when 'normal' people woke up out of slumber to contribute, or contaminate, the mental airways with their common thoughts and aspirations. Ideas and dreams about meat, potatoes, and happy times eating them at the family dinner table. Karen never had happy dinner table times, because both of her parents were blessed, or cursed, with the ability to think and the requirement to always do so. Thinking people were never really happy ones, she recalled from those political and philosophical 'sessions' around the Lubinska dinner table. Her father was a minimum-wage earning Polish Activist who cared about the Workers. Unfortunately, he cared too much about his wife, who cared for nothing except the bottle in her later years. The Doctors said she had a rare neurological disease, a 'syndrome' they called it, combined with skin that bruised easily, bones that ached when the weather got damp and guts that twisted inside her no matter what she ate or didn't eat. Rapid onset of such at the age Karen was just on the verge of 'celebrating' herself.

Irish whisky was the only cure, so it seemed. It stopped the shakes, the voices in the head, and the demons she seemed to see everywhere. Her death by suicide was a mercy-killing, or perhaps it WAS a mercy killing. Karen's father never told her the whole story. His tombstone a year after Karen's mother's early morning 'accidental fall' off the fire escape said it all, between the lines.

But maybe there was something else about dawn. An incarnation or two, or twenty, when she was executed, perhaps. Maybe for crimes she DID commit. It felt that way on Sunday Morning, Easter, according to the chanting outside her window. Or maybe there was another explanation for the disconnection to time and place. Everything seeming new and old. Frightening and re-assuring. Hot and cold. Dark and light. It could only be one 'condition', and place.

"Purgatory," she thought. "Or hell." The latter was most likely, particularly with the singing outside. Easter chants, droning on, and on, and on in Ukrainian, the still-God-believing peasants miserable in their 'happiness'. Feeling the body below the tight neck, she felt her belly. Nothing there. Down to flappy skin on aching bone. It was all a dream, or maybe it wasn't. The cry of a child from the next room awakened her to the reality of it, the image of perfect motherhood around it.

“We should give him a name,” Elena said. The sun illuminated her three-inch-long brown hair with a heavenly halo, her smile radiant. By the feel of it, she had been through this before. The hard-as-nails Commandress was a Mother at the core, and a tender one at that. There was just one problem with it all.

Karen stumbled when she tried getting out of the cot, converted into a bed by straw, feathers and the blankets that, through hard work, had no lice, ticks or even mouse manure within its fabric. “The child is...mine, I think,” she said through labored breaths holding onto a three and a half-legged chair with a shakey hand, bruises developing on her wrists, joints aching, her breasts hurting, hard and empty. “And it really IS a...”

Elena showed Karen the evidence of the lad’s manhood, not a large penis, but solid, well-proportioned and balanced to the boy’s body. His eyes were bright, Alive with new possibilities.

“Bright blue, like his grandfather,” Karen smiled.

“And no mustache under his nose, ‘Mrs. Lubinska.

“Like his father,” Karen lamented.

Elena offered her a feel of the baby’s hand as the child laughed a ‘hello’ to its mother.

Reaching out, Karen felt something pulling her back. “No,” she said. “He’s...”

“His own man!” Elena boasted. “Let him show you himself.”

Elena put the smiling infant into Karen’s trembling arms. As soon as mother and child met, a cry came from its lips.

“I...I...” Karen stuttered. “I love you, my...” she said to the lad. But the more she spoke, the louder the boy cried.

Elena stepped in, her maternal instinct at full power, and receptivity. “He just has to get used to you.”

Karen supposed that this was the case, but saw something different. The child seemed natural with Elena. Like they shared something no one else did, or could. In the middle of a War designed to destroy Russia and Germany, and everyone in between, here were these two lives sharing something new with each other. Maybe it was ‘technique’, or maybe something that happened over the last two days. It has been almost 48 hours since she gave birth to the child, according to the Grandfather clock on the farmhouse wall, still ticking away the time, louder than ever.

Then, something from outside, the most frightening sound audible at the farmhouse hideout. Silence. And from two people noted as being absent very notably.

“Where’s Wilhelm, and Yolinki?” Karen looked out the window. Their horses were gone, as was all of their equipment.

“Orders to go somewhere else,” Elena explained.

“Orders from who?” Karen challenged.

“Someone on the other end of the radio.” Elena went back to the more important job at hand, playing ‘catch the mouse’ with ammunition cartridges converted into a nipple for the newborn bundle of joy. “The radio that you found in the chickenhouse.”

“And didn’t tell you about, yes I know,” Karen confessed. “It didn’t seem to work, and didn’t look like much of a radio,” she continued. “It was just junk. I wasn’t hiding anything from you or anything else. There wasn’t anything to...hide.”

The explanation fell on pre-occupied ears, an utterance from Elena that Karen hadn’t heard from her ever since she wound up in her ‘Unit’ on the eve of the German invasion of Russia. It was laughter. Honest and kind laughter based in happiness, not a necessary release of tension or frustration. The American ex-patriate found herself smiling, happy for the boy’s Slavic Stepmother, and for him as well. There was only one thing to do now, one question left to ask.

“I’ll make tea?” Karen asked.

“Yes, that would be nice,” Elena said. “Thank you, Karen.”

The first time Elena said ‘thank you’, AND addressed ‘Mrs. Lubinska’ by her Christian-Jewish name. Much to be grateful for, Karen felt. She made her feet carry her into the ‘kitchen’, poured the water from the bucket, and put the fire on. To celebrate the moment, she would add some sugar to the tea this time. The two ‘mothers’ would sit with the child, like civilized women, and share stories about what the child would grow up to be. Assuming, of course, that he would be allowed to grow up at all.

CHAPTER 39

Illya the Inevitable galloped his horse back from town with the news. He assumed it was good, since the citizens of Jelinka and the villages around it were celebrating. As were the Red Army troops who joined the Ukrainian Nationalists. “The Germans are going back to Germany!” he yelled out at the top of his lungs as he rode up to the farmhouse, unloading the supplies he was sent to obtain from his various ‘bosses’. Some were requested by Mrs. Lubinska, some by Miss Elena, and some by the newest arrival to the still-hidden family, ‘Vladimir’. “The Germans are going back to Germany!” he sang to the tune of marching songs he had heard from Nazi and Red Army troops. This time, it was real. After all, it was in print. Anything that was in print was real to Ivan. It had to be. People who could write so many words were too smart to lie.

He showed the paper to Mrs. Lubinska and Miss Elena, who liked to be called Lady Elena and wear dresses and skirts now. They seemed very friendly with each other lately. They had tea with each other, hugged each other and were now sleeping in the same room. They had to, since taking care of a baby was a two woman job. Illya was now the ‘man’ of the family, hunting what he could from town and shooting whatever game he could find in what was left of the woods. It was a proud Spring going into Summer. Good weather, too. And Vladimir was growing bigger and bigger every day. He was a lucky boy, having TWO mothers and, an Uncle. Uncle Illya, who would take him hunting when he was older. Riding horses as soon as he could stand up, or hold himself up on a saddle-horn. Swimming in the pond that the boy seemed to want to crawl into on a warmer day than normal for this time of year.

“You like the news?” he asked his family by the cool waters. “The words made the people in town happy.”

Mrs. Lubinska smiled. Vladimir pointed to the paper like he could read it. But Lady Elena wasn’t so happy.

“What’s wrong?” Illya asked.

“Order 227.” she said.

Even Illya knew about the Order that was known to every Russian soldier, but never shared with any of Russia’s Allies. “You didn’t surrender. You didn’t retreat from German soldiers. You innocent.”

“Innocent?” Elena muttered, the meaning behind her words more secret than ever. Mrs. Lubinska knew something about it, but not a lot.

Miss Elena seemed sad and afraid. Addressing the latter, Illya sat next to her. “Order 227 say that Russians who surrender to Germans are traitors and will be shot.”

“Or worse,” Elena said, again knowing more than she was saying.

“And you are Major in Russian Army, Lady Elena?”

“Was...” Mrs. Lubinska said.

“And are again. You see?” Illya showed her an article which was explained to him in town. As the Sergeant in town explained it, everyone who wanted to fight against the Germans would be welcomed to join the Russians. Even Bandaras, the man who wanted to make Ukraine a country of its own. His picture was on the newspaper, along with Lady Elena’s in her Red Army Uniform.

Mrs. Lubinska read the article. “It does look like you, Elena.”

“All too much like me,” Lady Elena said.

“So, Comrade Stalin gives Bandaras and you, Lady General Elena, Amnesty?” Illya asked.

“Amnesty, Bolshevik style,” Elena stated. She looked at Mrs. Lubinska. They were both very afraid.

Illya looked at young Vladimir, who didn’t seem afraid of anything. Vladimir heard ducks in the pond and rolled over, crawling in to say hello to them. Just as the boy was about to sink into the mud and fall underwater, Illya swooped him up. The boy cried, a lot.

“What...am I supposed to do?” Ivan asked, Vladimir’s mothers looking at each other with even more fear. “I protect you all!” he claimed, picking up a stick, wielding it like Prince Vladmir of old. “I protect you from Stalin, Hitler, Roosevelt and the Devil himself! You my family now.”

“A family which needs some...restructuring,” Mrs. Lubinska said, thinking with Miss Elena again.

“In a different location,” Lady Elena said. “With you as...”

“...You?” Mrs. Lubinska continued.

“Someone better than me,” Lady Elena said.

“And you’ll be...?” Mrs. Lubinska asked.

Lady Elena looked at Illya. “Can we be alone?” she asked.

“Yes, but I have to give you message first,” he said.

“From Wilhelm?” Mrs. Lubinska asked. She seemed eager to hear from the small, ugly German who spoke Russian and every other language so well.

“No,” Ivan replied. “There was someone in town who was asking for you, Mrs. Lubinska.”

“Who, Ivan?” she asked, trying to not seem afraid.

“He said he was Mister Lubinska.”

“Mister MICHAEL Lubinska?” Elena interjected.

“Yes. And he had another name, too. Wilson. Michael...Yes, Wilson.”

Vladimir’s two mothers got very angry.

“Was he wearing a uniform?” Miss Elena asked.

“Yes. Like the business people wear in the pictures about New York. The kind of clothes rich people from Wall Street wear.”

“The most dangerous uniform of them all,” Mrs. Lubinska said. She turned to Illya.

“Yes, I leave you both alone now,” he said, knowing his place, and role. He took Vladimir by the hand, bringing him into his arms. The boy seemed happy with him. But something in the air told Ivan that it would be the last time he would see the boy happy ever again. And maybe the last time he would see Vladimir’s two mothers. At least alive.

CHAPTER 40

As young Vladimir saw it, or could have seen it, the situation was very bizarre. The two women looking after him had been called him ‘Prince’, ‘President’, ‘Pauper’ and even the ‘F’ word. ‘Feuhrer’, he thought it sounded like. A strange sounding word for something that made people stand at attention in pride and shake with fear, sometimes both at once.

It was supper time, cabbage and some kind of meat, again with some goat’s milk. Not as good as milk from his mother, the one with the big breasts, short hair, and Russian accent. Uncle Illya was off in the woods, maybe getting more meat. Or bringing in more firewood. But why get more wood when the weather was getting warmer, and the days longer? It didn’t make sense, but such as was Vladimir’s job now. Watching the world unfold in front of his ever-widening eyes, and watching the worlds of Mother Karen and Baba Elena changing into something very different. Indeed, they were not the same either as he watched the transformation unfold.

“Are you sure about this?” Elena asked Karen as they both stood in front of a shining piece of metal which, with the right kind of light, let them see their own reflection in it.

“Yes,” Karen said as she twirled her fingers through her long golden hair, a bunch of clothes in the middle of the floor.

They looked at the pictures, and the clothes again. And at a hat that looked like cloth with lots of holes in it. Elena took off her trousers and put on a dress, the one Karen was wearing all day, and all week. It was pretty. Flowers still on it, not too faded out with dried mud. It made her look pretty, too. Even attractive, as Vladimir was reminded that he was a BOY child from somewhere inside of himself. Then Karen stood behind her, letting her hair flow down over Elena’s head.

Vladimir had never seen Baba Elena with long, blonde hair. It made her look young, pretty and, according to what Karen said, nothing like Mother Karen.

“I guess I don’t look like me anymore,” Elena said. “But who shall I be?”

“My wife,” Karen said in a deep voice, kissing her on the cheek, then the lips.

“I’m convinced,” Elena said. “And Vladimir probably enjoyed watching!” she said with expressive humor. “But you have to convince people a lot more dangerous than I am, or used to be.”

“I know,” Karen said. She looked at herself in the reflection, making motions with her hair, pulling it back, crunching it up and tying it down. With the brown uniform on her, the trousers and big shoulder shirt, she looked like Illya. The kind of man Uncle Ivan wanted to be, and was, at least on the inside.

Elena picked up a pair of metal things that clicked when you brought them together. “So, I’m the wife.”

“Yes,” Karen said, thinking something very scary, though she didn’t seem so scared.

“With...that.” Elena grabbed hold of Karen’s hair, holding it half way down.

“ALL of it!” Karen said, boldly.

“But I don’t need all of--“

Karen kissed Elena again. Elena smiled, then crossed herself, like Ivan did every time he caught himself watching Baba and Mother kiss each other.

Karen nodded ‘yes’. Elena put the two pieces of metal together and cut off Karen’s hair, down to near where the skin was. She gathered it in a ball on the floor, and put the strands into the burlap hat, then tried the hat on. Baba Elena was...Mother Elena. Young, pretty and one of the most beautiful women Vladimir ever saw. And with boots on her feet, and some mud on her face, and one of the long metal sticks that were used to kill animals, or people, Mother Karen became Vladimir’s Uncle, or a word they said in strange ways, ‘father’.

Vladimir looked at Elena walking around the room like a lady, and Karen marching around like a man. He smiled, and laughed. It was funny. But it didn’t look like what Mother and Father was talking about was very funny. They were worried again, like they always were.

Elena packed my toys, some clothes, a few thunder sticks, and little chunks of metal that go into them. “Where are we going?” She asked ‘Papa’ Karen.

“Sweden.” Karen said, looking at some papers. “I have a friend who is there.”

“A friend who put you in jail in the first place, Karen.”

Father Karen didn’t say anything. She ran her fingers over the top of her head, combing the little bit of hair she purposely left on top of it, then tried on some hats. They had different metal pictures on them. Like they were different costumes for different occasions, and different people. Big people tell who they are, apparently, by what kind of hat they have on.

“He framed you for murder!” Mother Elena screamed into the face of Father Karen. “Buck White put you in jail! Death row!”

“And he got me out!” Karen yelled back.

“Like he’s going to get ME out of Russia, and your, OUR child out of...” Elena started to cry. Vladimir seldom saw Baba Elena cry, but she was crying now. Why? Was she scared? Was she angry? Whatever she was, Karen hugged her and made her stop crying.

“Where are we going?” Vladimir asked his to mothers as they picked him up, in a language he hoped they’d understand.

“We’re going on a picnic, my love” Mama Karen said with her new haircut, hugging the lad.

Elena looked outside, pulling Mama Karen's hair around her cheeks. She didn't seem so happy, but she appeared to be....relieved.

CHAPTER 41

Buck White looked at his watch again. Ten past three. Two hours after the appointed hour with the Superior he conferred with, but never really talked to, at least in private. He took another sip of tea left by the Secretary. It was weaker than Mildred's brew, its blandness hidden by extra lumps of sugar. He thought it fitting, then odd. Then a thought came out of thin air. "I wonder if Socrates' hemlock was laced with honey?" he contemplated. "When civilized people kill dangerous or influential ones, it's like that. We don't want to see the blood, don't want to hear the pain, and don't want to hide the fact that those who are most valuable to us are the first ones to be considered expendable, and---"

The door opened, a puff of cigar smoke emerging from the small room beyond the large waiting area. "Enter," the grobbly voice said, the scotch on the man's breath emanating like a foul and furious wind from a direction far colder than North.

White braced himself. Whatever news awaited him at the other side was not good. The bulldog's back was turned, a bad sign according to the rumors. And whenever 'Old Winny' was painting...someone's blood would wind up on the next canvas.

White sat down, noticing the painting. It was in 'primitive' style, more bold than classy, more balls than finnese. Its use of color, distinguished lines and expressions of unbridled passion reminded him of 'the Housepainter' in Germany, his favorite agent's unmarried husband, his country's most feared enemy.

"So, what do you think?" Churchill asked.

"The brush style is very distinctive, Sir," White replied.

"Like the code your operative, Miss Lubinska used your American radio to contact our office," the PM grumbled. "Straight, to the point and violating all the rules that make us British."

"Spelling mistakes, Sir?" White mused, remembering Karen's days at Camp X. The way she so masterfully learned Morse Code, operations of machinery and how to spell Labor without U, omitting commas before an 'and', ignoring superfluous words like 'please' and 'sorry', insisting that the brevity of American English was why the Yanks beat the Canuks and Limeys back in 1776. "Miss Lubinska is a potentially powerful agent, who can help us win the war, Sir."

"Yes, I know," Churchill said, putting down his paintbrush, picking up a bottle of Scotch, pouring one for himself and his 'invited' American guest.

White didn't ask what they were drinking to, or for. The whiskey tasted smooth. The worry lines in Churchill's face didn't.

"You've reached a decision about the child, Sir?" White asked. "The Germans have published a forty thousand mark reward on his body, and his mother's head. A hundred thousand or more to any of our agents who turns sides, or makes a mistake in the field. While we---

"---That word 'we'," Churchill grumbled. "It means so many things these days. And how you say it." He looked out the window at the city that had, so far, survived the blitz. Waiting for the next round of German technology, rockets that could be fired from land from across the channel, according to intelligence reports and the un-published crashes from the sky observed from the cliffs of Dover. "If you say 'we' with a Russian accent, it means that 'we' want the mother to be raped by Comrade Stalin followed by having her breast cut off. The boy crippled and mutilated, and both of them dropped in with a parachute bearing the Worker's hammer and sickle to Hitler's Eagle's Nest in the Alps."

"And if 'we' is said with an English accent, Sir?" White held his breath, waiting for an answer.

"To be British is to be 'civilized'." Churchill said. "After we confirm by all biological tests available that Hitler is the lad's father and Karen is the boy's mother, we could arrange for appropriate term for the boy's clandestine return."

"In return for Hitler giving up a country of our choice, and our approval?" White surmised. By the look in Churchill's eyes, the rumors were correct. But one thing was left out of the rumors.

"And as for Karen Lubinska, Sir?" Buck inquired.

"Unit 24, I am afraid."

"Quite." White found his mouth speaking in British English. And the meaning of the words was clear in America, Canadian and British English. Unit 24 was one of those 'holding camps' where people who went in never came out. Treatment was humane, prisoners provided with every need imaginable, with the exception of two 'luxuries'---freedom and accessibility to ANYone in the outside world. "Unit 24...For twenty years, Sir?"

Churchill sighed. His gaze fell downward, his face determined. "Let's pray it's for only twenty years. And that we don't have to start a war with the Bolsheviks that will last longer than the one we're fighting against the Nazis."

"Winning against the Nazis, Sir," the American operative whose real rank was kept a secret from all his superiors affirmed.

But Churchill wasn't as affirmative. Daily, he'd oscillate between believing that the powers of good would win the war, and hoping such an outcome would emerge. Two techniques were called into play when the latter was the most logical conclusion. One was the skill he learned as an actor during those 'side courses' required of every lad born to his pedigree, perfected on the floor of Parliament. The second was his anger.

"Damn it, man!" Churchill screamed at White, which was more to the point of the meeting. "We've lost contact with Miss Lubinska. Am I looking at the man who can fix it or not!"

"You're looking at the man who is responsible for her current predicament, Sir," White answered with his mouth. Between his ears another conversation was taking place. About past events, such as what started it all. His younger years as G-man in the 'good old days' when a score against a ring of bootleggers would get you one step up the ladder, conviction of a pro-labor/labour Bolshevik would get you two rungs up. His brilliant manner of gathering evidence against Karen Lubinska, linking her up to the

murder of oil barron G.W. Harrington and right wing journalism Czar K. Edward Robart in their beds at the Waldorf after being visited by 'an attractive yet highly opinionated young lady', according to the front desk . And the lingering suspicion that the man who might have been the real murderer of those links in the upper rung of the American Economic food chain really was a man with a New England accent, according to Karen's testimony. And that the mythical bellhop she fingered was no myth at all, but a reality. Maybe Michael Wilson himself, who became quite rich after Karen's arrest for the murders in question. An after thought, confirmed by very private inquiries through contacts who were definitely not 'to the manner born'.

But the matter at hand was Churchill. "It would be interesting to see what would happen if 'we' had an American subtext to it."

Churchill lit his cigar, puffing away, coughing twice.

"Quite, Sir." White replied, picking up on the signals, and subtext that was all the more clear because it was NOT stated.

Churchill picked up his paintbrush. White lifted his glass of scotch, gulping down the entire glass. It tasted smooth to the tongue, with an after-kick that rivaled any legal or illegally manufactured Kentucky bourbon he had every had, or been 'had by'. He left the room, knowing what had to be done, and fully realizing the consequences if he failed.

CHAPTER 42

Michael Wilson had distinguished himself well during his graduate studies at Harvard in 1931. He was world acclaimed for his study of torture from the times of the Romans to the present. Electrocutions, mock executions, sleep deprivation, brandings, pulling tendons around painful joints, crushing of fingers, nails through palms, exposure of intestines, pulling out fingernails, drowning to a point where the victim saw Demons of death rather than Angels of mercy. All scientifically orchestrated with humiliation. Everyone talks. But for special prisoner with special information, 'Father Michael' had to use special methods. It went with the case, and with his persona, an Orthodox Ukrainian priest allowed to wear the robes of his faith, thanks to lax regulations adopted by the Red Army to ensure cooperation of its new Allies against the Nazis, the Ukrainians and any Ukrainian Nationalist who had any sense of honor or logic.

Father Wilson sat on the chair next to the three and a half-legged table, a Nun behind him, her eyes downward, her face hidden by layers of wardrobe that hadn't been allowed in the Ukraine for the last ten years.

"So, Illya," Wilson asked of his host, noting fresh newspapers selectively cut up in the basket near the fireplace. "Where are your houseguests?"

"Not here, Father," Illya the Inevitable said, bringing tea to the Good Father, offering it to the Nun who remained standing, non-eating and silent.

"You are sure?" Wilson said. He showed Ivan pictures of Karen from the good old days when they were dating, the challenging middle days when she was in jail, and the recent ones available through HIS contacts at Camp X and Churchill's office. "Where is she?" Wilson said.

"These are the same woman?" Illya asked, smiling.

"It is a sin to lie, you know," Father Michael said sternly, tasting the tea, nodding with approval as to its taste.

"If she was here, I would not be allowed to tell you she was here," Ivan said.

"And if she wasn't here, where would she be?" Wilson pressed.

"I don't..."

"Of course you don't know," Father Michael continued. He looked up at the only other human likeness in print or paint in the room. "Saint Vladmir knows that you don't know where they are or aren't, perhaps."

“Vladimir,” Illya boasted. “A good name for the child who...” Illya mouth froze. His eyes looked behind his sockets. He stumbled back to the only haven he knew, and could trust.

“Mozart,” Michael noted as he heard the notes, and the music. “You have to be a virgin to play Mozart.”

The Nun shook her head. Michael instructed her to go to the door, remaining at her post, and station. She obeyed.

Michael sat down on the piano bench next to the village idiot who the villagers said knew nothing and everything. He showed her Karen’s pictures again. Ivan’s stared beyond them at the keyboard, playing Mozart with fear and doubt, the kind of emotion only written into the Old Master’s last piece, the Requiem, as Michael recalled, and now heard.

“Illya, my son,” Father Michael said, putting away the photos, placing his hand gently on the shaking lad’s ox-sized shoulders.

“Yes, Father?” he stuttered.

“I, like you, was deceived by the Dark Angel of Light.” A tear came down his face.

“She is not here...And I am not allowed to say where she---“

“Mrs. Lubinska isn’t who she says she is,” Father Michael related, calmly and compassionately.

“That’s what Lady Elena said when she...” Illya stopped himself again. He screamed in pain. The kind of pain that paralyzed his fingers. Made him unable to find refuge in the music. All they could create was noise from the piano.

The Nun pulled out the newspaper from the basket. The picture-less article was about Major Elena Putkin, a once-decorated hero of the Revolution now wanted by the Soviet Authorities for being a traitor to Mother Russia. Michael remembered her face, and recalled how the village doctor described Illya’s maladies, and strengths.

“Do you know what the Anti-Christ is?” Father Michael asked Ivan.

“The devil,” Illya stated, shocked. “Who sends you to hell when you go back on your word. When you hurt good people.”

“Or if you confuse good people with bad people.”

“Lady Elena was...is...good person.”

Seeing the opportunity, and knowing Karen’s strengths, and proclivities, Michael continued. “A good person who does bad things, like making love...sex...with another woman?”

Illya stopped his ranting of the mouth and fist.

“A woman who violated God’s law with another woman? And who, together, give birth to a son who is no man at all.”

Illya’s face dropped to the floor.

“You mean, that Vladimir is...”

“Yes, my son. The anti-Christ. And his two ‘mothers’ are demons. Devils.”

“Who stayed at my house,” Illya confessed.

“And who ate at your table.”

“And who drank my tea from my grandmother’s cup...” Ivan grabbed hold of the teacup from which Father Michael was drinking, and every other item of china and cutlery contaminated by the ‘lady demons’. She smashed them on the floor. “I’m a...a...”

“Saved soul, if you can help us find them.”

“I can’t,” Illya said “They...they...didn’t tell me where they were going.”

“But you saw where they went?” the Nun answered, in a low voice, her face hidden.

Michael disapproved of her actions, but had to go with it.

“Yes...I saw them go...”

Illya pointed to the North, East, South, then West.. His finger remained in that direction his direction clear and firm.

Michael looked around at the maps, torn in pieces, one cold night away from being firewood. Placing them together, he surmised that Indeed it was true. The depressions left in the maps indicated a Westward direction. The Nun looked at them too. “They are heading right into our lines”, she smirked.

“Yes, Sister Holz,” Michael said, noting the details not available to his Nazi superior, the checkpoints and drop off zones known only to his Allied bosses. “And straight to MY country.”

“Your country, Sister?” Ivan said. “What do you want me to do?”

“The right thing for a sinner who helped Demon Women give birth to the AntiChrist,” Michael said. He pointed to his crucifix, the likeness of Jesus on the cross very evident.

“Yes, if I am worthy, Father.”

You are, my Son.” Michael confirmed with a touch on his shoulder.

Father Michael and Sister Holz left the farm on two good horses. Illya remained, nailed to a cross in the barn, at his own request. Given a lethal communion cyanide wafer, by Sister Holz.

CHAPTER 43

‘Captain Karen’s’ new any-country-Army haircut was indeed a bone chilling experience, added to by the falling of fresh snow amidst leaves still trying to hold onto their fall foliage. “Is it true that Christmas comes in October in this part of the world, Elena?” she asked her companion ‘wife’ behind her as he trail Westward got colder and higher.

“We celebrate it early, so the authorities don’t notice it,” the former Commander said from atop her horse, the gentle steed upon which Vladimir could be mounted safely.

Though the wind penetrated through Karen’s Russian Uniform, she smiled warmly as she gazed behind her at Mother Elena and the child who half of Europe and perhaps some of America wanted to get their hands on. Though jealous about her offspring in another woman’s arms, Elena was as natural a mother as they came. Loving. Warm. Dedicated. And empathic. She could feel Vladimir’s emotions and thoughts before he got them, so it seemed. A required skill when trying to keep a 4 month old child healthy, happy and quiet in territory that was hostile, no matter what uniforms were being worn by the combatants.

Yes, it did look like a Christmas card, Elena as Mary, Karen as Joseph and Vladimir as...who could say? The lad was growing up fast, into his genetics, perhaps, or maybe into something else. He seemed to be a ‘normal’ child, with a thinking brain, curious eyes, a strong will, and a vocabulary that was becoming very international. Indeed, the vocabulary between Karen and Elena had evolved into a broken English-Russian that made no sense to anyone except them. If that was the language that Vladimir would grow into, so much the better. There would be time for adjustments back home.

“Back home” Karen thought to herself. Physical safety dictated that it was in America, a country she loved and hated with equal passion. But what would be the chances of an anonymous child brought up by two anonymous Mommies. Perhaps other options were doable. An operation to become the boy’s father biologically? ‘Lady Elena’ had always mused about what life would be like in America with her ‘Sir Karen’ during intimate moments on the farm that could have been witnessed by Ivan, and were noted by God, if He, or She, had any eyes open after 1939.

Fantasies about remote locations back home, with new names for a new life materialized in Karen’s head. The boy would have to learn English, or more accurately, American, in school somewhere, and be given a name. Lubinska, the name of her father’s clan, and caste in those golden years when the Poles had their own country? Her mother’s maiden name, ‘O’Brien’? Certainly ‘Wilson’ was out, though it did have a ring of respectability to it. As for the maternal contribution to the name-bearing endeavor, there was no data to work from. Elena had never given her Sir name to Karen, and to the best of the printed matter, ‘Putkin’ was the name she used most. Another one of Elena’s secrets, like the reason why her maternal instincts were so developed, and ingrained into her.

Karen's horse stopped, turning its head down into the valley below. Or at least it looked like a valley. The Polish Arabian was as hotblooded as any Kentucky thoroughbred, its ears open to anything scary in the woods.

Elena looked around. "He's seeing ghosts again, or his own shadow. I don't see anything."

"He hears something. And so do I, I think." Karen's inner ear could hear something in the valley, her instincts back up to Camp X levels, and beyond. She dismounted, crawling down into the valley with her rifle, and Elena's weapon of choice---a compound cross-bow dating back to the Tatars. Fashioned by Illya to hunt meat, used by partisans to silently hunt two legged rats invading their country.

Elena took cover, with the child, mouthing a nursery rhyme to him. Karen worked her way into the sparsely-wooded meadow. Armies had been here before, the leaves burnt down and shot off about a week ago, she surmised. Nothing of value to be obtained. No footprints of wildlife. Human remains removed, so it seemed. Bullet holes carpeting the trees and rocks like snow on a frozen New England pond. Quiet. Silent. Very loudly Silent, with the feel of something behind her.

"Ghosts, maybe" she thought. "I wouldn't be surprised if THEY joined in this War too. We wouldn't want anyone left out of the glory, the spoils and the----"

Her speculation was interrupted by an arrow from another world, shot at the base of her foot. "The next one is in your heart if you don't tell me who you are and what your business is here!"

The language was fluent Russian. Its speaker was not.

"Yolinki? Is that you?" Karen asked as he exited the woods, his back laden with all manner of weaponry, his belt containing German, Russian and even British issue ammunition.

"Who are YOU?" Yolinki demanded, firing a round of bullets at the tree behind Karen.

She dropped her weapons, turned around, slowly and took a better look at the Buddhist dissident who was sent to the Gulags for his passion for pacifism, released for his ability to kill. He seemed to enjoy having a gun in his hand now. In that proficiently sadistic way that happens on the way to becoming a general, or a corpse in a shoot-first-ask-questions-later war.

"It's me!" Karen said to Yolinki as he squinted his eyes. She wiped off the dirt from her face, special tar-stained silt that created the very real illusion of five o'clock shadow. "It's me, Karen?"

Yolinki looked closer into the eyes. He took off the hat. He aimed his gun at Karen's head. "Speak to me in your real voice! And tell me what you are doing in this sector!"

Karen put up her hands, unbuttoned her coat, and shirt, and showed him everything underneath it. "I'm here to be fucked, or fuck you, whichever comes first, Yolinki."

Yolinki could hardly believe his eyes, and ears. "Miss Lubinska!" he exclaimed with a joy he hadn't experienced in many months, so it seemed. "You are alive!" He reached his arms out to hug her. He felt strong, sincere, and terrified.

"Where the fuck were you?" Karen asked.

"Away, on orders," he lamented. "Which I will not obey anymore!" he declared.

CHAPTER 44

Joining the October Christmas trio on their way to the next manger, or well-hidden patch of woods, 'Uncle Yolinki' answered every question asked of him by Karen, Elena and even Vladimir, the lad's first spoken word being 'why?'. He shared stories about his brother when they were children in Turkistan, his father who put him in a monastery against his own will, and the Buddhist Priest who showed by example why young Yolinki should remain in the monastery 'just one more week' for so many weeks that became years. His martial arts teacher who showed how to stun, maim or kill a man in the most effective AND humane ways known to man and beast. His exploits as a freedom fighter in 'unpublished' war of Soviet expansion Eastward that was in active progress till well into 1927. His sabbatical in a Gulag at the Western-most tip of Russia's Arctic belt, where he saw either boys become real men, or real men become less than boys or beasts. His release, and a love affair with a woman who promised that she would wait for him after the War. Her death at Stalingrad. And the victories of the Soviet Armies against the Nazis. The only question he didn't answer was one. Karen asked it again.

"Wilhelm. What happened to him?"

"Yes," Elena said. "What happened to our loveable German troll, who, if you look at him the right way, is quite handsome."

"Re-assigned ...to another life." Yolinki reply, once again, invoking his belief in reincarnation, or perhaps something else.

"Where?" Karen barked out, for the fifth time.

"I don't know."

"Dead?" Elena gently asked.

"If he was lucky," Yolinki said, a tear coming down his cheek this time.

"Why?" Vladimir laughed out with that smile that fit so well below his shining eyes.

"I don't know," Yolinki confessed to Karen and Elena, and Vladimir.

"Why?" Vladimir asked his Uncle again.

"I don't know!!!" Yolinki screamed at the child.

Elena put her hand over the child's mouth, rocking and singing it into a better frame of mind, and Soul. She gave that 'enough already' look to Karen, relating one of those Karo-Elenese words to her friend, ally, lover and in the truest sense of the word, Comrade.

“What did she say?” Yolinki asked Karen.

“It loses everything in translation,” Karen replied, in Russian.

Indeed, it did. “Survivor’s guilt” was not something you learned in school. You learned it in life. And whatever had befallen Wilhelm, Yolinki considered it all his fault. At Camp X, one of the ten Commandments is that you are responsible for everyone, but no one’s death is your fault. Yet, maybe that practical wisdom didn’t translate into a Buddhist Bolshevik’s belief system so easily.

“You have time to think, no time to reflect,” Camp X’ taught its agents. It seemed to happen that way during those brief periods of terror that broke up the boredom, and loneliness.

“You have done well not to be identified,” Yolinki noted of his Comrades. “I could hardly identify you myself.”

“What’s the price on our heads now?” Elena asked.

“For you, twenty-thousand rubles, and dinner with Stalin himself.”

“And maybe a get your husband out of the Gulag card...I’m flattered,” the ex-Red Army officer now a fugitive sighed.

“And me?” Karen asked.

“About the same, depending on who is going to turn you in, and to who,” the cold reply.

“Interesting.” Karen noted. “And my child?”

“OUR child!” Elena blasted out.

“Yes, our child.” Captain Lubinska said with a fatherly and motherly tone. “What is our child worth now?”

“Everything to you, I see,” Yolinki smiled back. “That makes me telling you the price irrelevant.”

Using the silence, and reflection, Yolinki gave voice to the question he was not allowed to ask, even from the first meeting with the American ‘cry baby’. Elena, his former Commander, wouldn’t be happy with asking the question. He sensed it in her eyed. But according to Order Number One, invoked and used during the Civil War against the Whites and Counter-Revolutionaries, all Bolsheviks enlisted men were entitled to question orders from above.

“Where are we going, Captain Lubinska?” Yolinka asked Karen.

“America,” she said with a smile.

“By way of Rulskov,” Elena interjected, firmly.

“That’s not so good a plan,” Yolinki related. “Intelligence reports I have heard from intelligent people say that---“

“---We go by way of Rulskov.” Elena interjected in her no-nonsense Commandress tone.

Karen agreed, but more out of friendship and trust than hard data. But the hardest data was that she was alive, well and even happy. A condition that only came into place when Elena came into her life.

Pulling the horses to a patch of grass under the cover of trees still bearing their leaves, Yolinki drew the map, as he saw and knew it.

“Before my unit was massacred, to the last man, woman and child, I saw German tanks coming through Rulskov, moving Eastward.”

“But the German Army is in retreat now,” Karen said. “That’s what we’ve seen.”

“And been told through the radio,” Elena said.

“You have radio?” Yolinki asked.

“Had,” Karen confessed. “Technical problems came up.”

“Like they always do, in the anti-German units that have radios,” Yolinki related. “But what I’ve seen, and heard, is that the Germans are moving ahead at Lembuck. Laying siege to Leningrad at all costs.”

“Fight or die to the last man,” Karen translated, in American English. “Their Alamo.”

“Which they will win this time.”

“Why?” Karen asked.

“Because German radios work, and Germans know how to fix them when they don’t.” the Buddhist Warrior’s terse reply.

Elena looked at the map drawn in the dirt. Making her own lines, arrows and rivers, she drew a course out, serpentine around the ancient Amber Road Karen’s Polish father told legends and stories about.

“We go to Minsk, then Wilno, then if we can, to Gdansk, if we have to Lembock.

“Instead of your, and our, original plan, which took you South to the Danube, then---” Yolinki challenged.

“---Order Number one says that enlisted men are entitled to question orders intelligently!” the former Commandress barked back.

As Karen observed it, they were re-enacting past histories and agendas. The kind that would stay secret, to and even beyond the grave. She could hear the tension within their Silences. The past orders given to ‘Special Units’ such as Yolinki’s, where political dissidents were put into suicide missions. The present curse that allowed Yolinki to survive every attack while his Comrades, and Friends, died horrible deaths. But all could hear the Industrial Age marching forward at unprecedented ferocity.

“German artillery,” Yolinki noted of the first rounds of distant thunder penetrating the woods.

“And Bolshevik tanks.” Elena identified from the next set of sounds that broke the silence.

A look from the top revealed it all. The Germans were making a last ditch stand on the West side of the newly formed river of mud that separated them from a Red Army division of infantry and tanks who were marching into a certain trap.

“A horse, my Salvation for a horse,” Yolinki said, looking towards his horse, taking out a piece of apple, giving it to the animal, while saying a special prayer.

“What is that?” Karen asked.

“His death song. Final rights for him, and, if it comes to it, his horse,” Elena said, crossing herself in Orthodox Ukrainian style.

Karen looked at the Armies that were about to collide. The Russians were advancing boldly, heads held high, singing every song about Mother Russia they knew, knowing that God and even Joseph Stalin were on their side. The Germans’ heads were low, their positions buried, a small detail in front as bait, the majority of the forces on the sides ready to move in for the kill once the Army of Peasants Soldiers moved into their trap.

“We can warn the Russians---“

“---And they’ll ignore us, or worse,” Elena said, pointing to the Commander of the Russian forces.

“Major Elinkoff,” Karen noted. “All mouth and no ears.”

“Who keeps getting Armies given to him, no matter how many battles he loses,” Elena sneered.

Karen squatted down, taking aim with her rifle at the Major who would sacrifice as many men as he had to in order to become a General.

“No, he’s mine!” Elena took aim, squeezed the trigger, then felt a thump on the back of her head, falling to the ground.

“She should be alert enough to argue with you in an hour,” Yolinki related. He got on his horse, heading down towards the German lines.

“What are you going to do?” Karen asked, and pleaded.

By the time Yolinki moved his horse from a trot to a lope, then a full gallop, it was all too obvious. Riding behind the concealed German positions, he blew up every nest of men and artillery he could, in the loudest of fashions. Evading capture and bullets, as was he blessing, and curse, he ran in front of the main line, drawing fire. Enough to be noticed even by Major Elinoff, who turned his men into a flanking maneuver, scattering them to places of cover.

By means of a miracle, Yolinki’s horse survived the attack, fleeing into the woods after his friend, and master dismounted. By means of necessity, Yolinki couldn’t be so fortunate. Such was his apparent strategy when he found a place in the mud-trap that could support his weight, sat in cross legged position, and chanted Buddhist prayers for peace, at the top of his lungs. Every bullet hole in his body made the prayer louder. The final one into his third eye, in the middle of his forehead, silencing him.

Karen couldn’t make out what kind of expression came over Yolinki’s face from her vantage point, but it looked like a smile. Anyone could make out the faces of the Germans, found out and outflanked by the Russian Army. In retreat, again, as the “Red Horde” extracted its revenge on the Master Aryian Race who came to the Steppes to civilized the ‘Untermench’. It was mob rule now. And back to the most important rule....survival, any way possible, by forming whatever alliances were required.

Karen found herself looking up to the sky. “Hey up there!” she screamed at the God she hoped was still Alive, or at least listening. “Make Yolinki reincarnate as anything but happy, healthy and Alive, and you’ll have ME to answer to!”

Vladimir started to cry. Karen took him on her knee, while she watched the battle below, trying to see who the winner would be, and the loser, hoping to keep evading them both.

“Why?” Vladimir said in his laughing voice.

Karen cried, for the first time. The death below finally got to her. Vladimir kept smiling. Karen hoped it was for the right reasons.

CHAPTER 45

Buck White stood at the gravesite in Bristol, its inscription reading “Died in the line of duty.” That ‘duty’ involved a daring flight across the English Channel, a Mission that was Top Secret, and a pilot who was drunk. Such was the official report, typed and signed by Mildred herself. The reality was quite different.

The wind felt cold, and damp, as it penetrated through White’s body. Sea breezes were supposed to feel warm, and soothing, but no matter how brightly the sun shone over the British Isles, the water around it was always more gray than blue, particularly when you had to do anything in or around it.

White had worked with the man buried under the ground for a long time, at least as far as time was measured in depth and expansiveness of experience. “He was not an attractive man to look at, even in his prime, valued for what was in his head more than what was in his heart. He was a master of disguises, deception and in his own way, decency,” White thought, out loud. “Most of the decisions he made were clearly against the political agenda of his own country. He felt more at home with foreigners than his own kind. He was in it for the...”

“...It was a long fall down from the plane,” the man behind White interjected, piling on the final loads of dirt onto the mound.

“He made a big splash as a man,” Buck replied. “Without him, hundreds of Allied lives and innocent Germans would have been lost.”

“Thousands, tens of thousands, actually,” the gravedigger boasted. He smiled. “And now that he’s freed from his body, identity and obligations to the world as it is, he’s a free man! Free to make the world anything he wants it to be!”

White sighed. “A ghost.”

“For as long as he has to be,” the gravedigger replied, adjusting the bag full of shattered bones under the dirt collected from the butcher shop. “What kind of flag should we put on the gravestone, Sir?”

“American.” White smirked. “He always did speak highly of America. Land of opportunity, right Wilhelm.”

Wilhelm ‘the mole’ nodded, pondering the issue, and the journey. His hatred for Hitler was genuine, and personal, never revealing the real identities of his gypsy-grifter family who perished at the madman’s hand during the legally-sanctioned ‘clean up of criminal elements’ in the Fatherland. His allegiance with the Soviets ‘functional’, wavering with each shift in the War and Stalin’s ever-changing policies towards his own people. His death at their hands of a German Tank division in the Ukraine, presumably commanded by Colonel Holz, a necessary accident. The German turncoat who was a master criminal/con man before the War could be a hero here in Britain, more useful to the Allied Cause by being officially dead. But the name remembered by those passing by the grave would not be his.

“Buckminster White?” Wilhelm read on the tombstone. “Have you changed your name and accent since you have been working with the English?” he asked the American Agent turned ‘ghost’.

“Quite,” White replied. He looked out over the ocean. The seas seemed bigger than usual, fiercer and more vicious than normal. Three foot waves seeming like thirty. He felt cold, alone, yet more directed than ever. If the Mission succeeded, he could come home. If it failed, his fate would be worse than the animals whose bones were substituting as his.

As for what that Mission was, only the highest in command knew. Their small number included Roosevelt, Churchill and, of course, Mildred. Hopefully, that select group didn’t include Michael Wilson. Using Wilhelm as a guide was a gamble, but one that had to be taken. The troll-like gimp had found his way back to England, and White, by way of the Russian Front. Such would have to be the route of Karen Lubinska and Vladamir, or whatever other name the ‘demon seed’ child was being called. “Paydirt” would be its name for anyone who found him first, and part of White was tempted to cash in on the deal himself. The equivalent of ten million dollars reward from Hitler or Stalin, arranged as a contingency plan, could be used on the black market to buy the freedom and salvation of thousands of Jews, or Allied prisoners. More to the point was the opportunity to buy Karen Lubinska, the woman he sent to prison for life, the kind of life she wanted, and deserved. Such was plan B. It made Plan A all the more urgent to achieve.

CHAPTER 46

German officers on the Russian Front feared three things. Winter cold and scorched earth left behind by their Slavic hosts made holding any line difficult. Red Army 'Untermench' who found ways to use individual initiative drove terror into conscripted Germans and career Nazis alike. And there were the 'ghost' units, or Unit, as the tale said. Explosions in the woods, a baragge of machine gun fire, mortars fired from positions that, according to the maps and intelligence reports, didn't have any 'enemy' in them at all. Then there were the orders given by an elusive German SS commander who came into one's Camp with SS attitude and papers to match, instructing troop movements to move to the South, East or West, to find no one and nothing. Except maybe a Russian unit ready to blast them to hell if they were Christians, Valhalla if they weren't. The 'ghost general' had a fair face, a high-pitched voice, and seemed attractive to men who considered themselves anything but homosexual.

Such were the rantings of 'Wolfgang', a teenaged conscript-turned-deserter to Elena at the campfire within the bush. He requested two things of her. Food, and clothing. "A skirt, or dress, if you have one to spare," he said in his broken Russian and slow German. "If my friends capture me, I am shot. If my friend's enemies capture me...". The boy who was expected to be a man couldn't say the words.

"Gulag?" Elena smiled, offering the frigid lad a bowl of soup, turnip greens and wild radishes mixed with a source of meat brought in by Karen whose source was questionable, but not questioned.

"Ya," Wolfgang lifted up the bowl of sustenance with his still-remaining frigid seven fingers, noticing another face amidst the singing woman's blankets. "Kinter?" he said, asking if the child was Elena's.

"Ya," Elena smiled back.

Sensing that the boy was hungry, Wolfgang gave him the bowl of soup from his trembling hand.

"Danke", Elena said, really meaning it. Wolfgang's motives seemed real, though his appearance at her camp was unexpected. He was hungry, cold, scared and in pain, but the welfare of the child came first. Her child, not his. Pretending to understand little of her visitor's ranting, she poured him a bowl of his own soup, with extra meat in it, She invited him to continue telling his story while she sang to Vladimir.

He rambled on about how his unit was diverted from their assigned route to one that was not on the maps, or in the orders. And how a Colonel ordered that they not deviate from it or they would be killed. And how units of partisans in the woods kept them moving AWAY from danger. Ghosts who blew things up.

"The Colonel said that he was looking after us," Wolfgang said, smiling at Vladimir, giving him all the meat in his soup. "Like we should take care of you, my child."

"My child," a voice rang out from behind Wolfgang, in very firm German. He froze, his cold face turning white. The intruder marched up, slowly, taking a firm stand behind the deserter. He raised his hands up in the air. "Shoot me, but save the child. It is an Aryan baby. See?"

Wolfgang showed his blonde hair to the intruder behind him, then grabbed the blonde lockes flowing down Elena's shoulders. She hugged Wolfgang, smiling as Illya the Idiot would on one of his happy and accomplished days.

The intruder came closer, showing his face. Wolfgang held his voice firm, his hand shaking as it removed the coat over his German uniform. "I am German. Heil Hitler." He raised his hand up, holding it in the Heil Salute.

"Das Ghost Colonel?" Elena said in German tinged with a touch of a Polish accent.

"Yavol, Frelien" the Colonel said, winking to Elena. "Du bist eine Frau?"

"Yes," Wolfgang said. "She is my wife."

"Who I will take care of," the Colonel replied in a smiling, and sincere, tone. "While you go back to your unit. And tell them that..." The Colonel scratched his chin, the visor covering his eyes and face.

"Tell then what, Colonel?" Wolfgang snapped at attention.

"That the Fatherland needs them Alive, at these coordinates." He scribbled notes on paper, gave it to the lad. "Go...Schne11!"

Wolfgang gathered his belongings, Elena adding some blankets, a skirt and a rag that had once been a dress bundled within it.

Elena looked at the Colonel. He showed no emotion except 'efficiency'. "I will see to it that she and your child are taken care of," the Colonel said to Wolfgang.

"Yes, he will...take care of us." Elena pulled open her blouse, revealing her very female breasts underneath it. She faked a smile, and waited for the Colonel's answer.

Wolfgang took a deep breath. A roll in the hay to preserve the life of a child was very good currency on the Russian Front. ANY currency that kept innocent people alive was good currency, and if anyone was still innocent, it was the children.

"No, Fraulien," the Colonel said, closing up Elena's blouse. He lifted the child into his arms, singing "Tomorrow Belongs to Me", the childlike melody carrying the lyrics ingrained in the Hitler Youth.

Wolfgang ran back to his unit, stumbling every third stride. He noticed the dress and skirt, winking 'thank you' to Elena for them.

"To your unit!" the Colonel barked out, seeming to have eyes behind his head. "Schnell!"

Wolfgang ran towards the Western horizon. Elena hopes that he would have enough sense to make a getaway to someplace safe, where-ever that was, any way he could. But as for the Colonel, he pulled out his swagger stick, flicking open the buttons on her blouse. He smiled, gazing at her bear chest.

"I will do anything you ask," she said. "On one condition."

"Which is?" the Colonel asked.

Elena took hold of the swagger stick, holding it in her hand. With a quick action she snapped it in the air, and pushed off the Colonel's hat. She smiled, washing the grime off his face.

Karen smiled as the Colonel camouflage came off, pursing her lips onto Elena's. It had been a long time since they had so much fun, and in such a good cause. Wolfgang would go back to his unit, give

them reports that would move them further back to Germany. The orders 'Comrade Captain Karen' had given to the Red Army Unit which was after the Germans would bring them somewhere else. If Bolshevik happened to meet Nazi on the battlefield, it would be somewhere else. Meanwhile, another several miles could be traversed by Elena and Vladimir safely. A few more miles closer to the Polish Port of Gdansk, the pre-arranged and well picked out exit point from the Continent, with clandestine access to fishing boats that could be paid to land in Massachusetts, Maine, or worse case scenerio, New Jersey.

"You did well, Comrade Captain, Herr Colonel" Elena muttered out while caressing Karen's breasts as the clothing she used so skillfully for disguise came off.

"No, WE did well," Karen exclaimed. "With the dynamite and grenades you stole from those Russian and German boys who----"

"---Never kissed me on the lips or...touched me there, like you are..."

As words moved to grunts, groans and giggles, Vladimir watched. What he learned would never be known, but one thing was known. The celebration of life would have to be brief for the three fugitives, on the run from the Soviets, the Nazis or anyone else who was after the price both parties had put on ALL of their heads.

CHAPTER 47

Michael Wilson always liked Polish food, and Polish women. There was always something defiant about them. Not Russian, not German, not Austrian. Not anything except who they were. Stripped down to their naked skins, chained to each other, and marched into the village square, they seemed to be perfect specimens, each unique.

“What do you see, Major?” Colonel Holz barked at the American, now fully clad in a German uniform befitting his new rank.

“Marie Curie,” Wilson found himself saying. “The fourth on the left looks like Marie Curie.”

“French whore!”, Holz mused.

“Polish genius,” Wilson countered, joining Holz on the ‘inspection’ line, moving to the specimen in question. “Who became a French scientist, then world sensation when she was nominated for the Nobel Prize at the same time she was having an affair with a Parisian biologist.”

“A Jew.”

“Actually, an agnostic, if you read her diary, Colonel.”

Holz took in a deep breath, worried about how his new protégé was fixed on the latest line of possible ‘Karens’. “This one is a Jew, Captain. Yours?”

Wilson hesitated, thinking that the woman in question knew no German, not caring if she did. “No, I am afraid. For my sake, hers, and yours, Colonel.”

“And the others?”

Major Wilson walked up and down the three lines of suspects rounded up by the bounty hunters, some beaten, some raped, some mutilated. Since no penalty was inflicted for bringing in false leads, there was no shortages of women rounded up who matched Karen Lubinska’s temperament, appearance and habits.

While some were far more attractive than Karen was, none were as beautiful in Michael’s eyes at least. Though he was hunting her down, he still loved her. It was a fact he couldn’t hide from himself. And a reality he had to keep from Holz. The rational for it all was simple---Germany would rule the world, and Karen could still be a part of it. If she refused, a cyanide capsule by Wilson’s hand would end it all for her before other means of killing would be employed. As for the child, it was the Furher’s property, any elevation above an ‘it’ up to Hitler himself.

Wilson saw bits of Karen in the ‘specimens’ brought in. He wondered what the only heir to the throne of the Third Reich would be like. The lad would have German wisdom, strength and conviction. Combined with Karen’s Irish-Polish flair, fire and flavor...a Prince the world could not resist, or resist against. If that was to be ‘its’ fate. All an American Fascist could do was follow orders, and anticipate the the Order of things dictated that he would be on top of the New World that, despite the problems on the Russian Front, rule enough of the world to make a difference in history, and any Wilson who IS a Wilson makes a difference in history.

“Well,” Holz said, as Wilson inspected the women for the third time, looking for marks that could be the result of plastic facial surgery. “Is she here?”

“No,” Wilson said, finding the word coming out with regret, and yearning. He walked back to the jeep. Holz followed. He nodded to the driver of the truck behind him. The car moved out of the village. The flap of the truck opened. Machine gun fire mowed down innocent suspected into a chain of human meat. Wilson found himself thinking one word when he heard the blasts, and screams. “Expendable.”

CHAPTER 48

Irish Seaman 'Billy' Schroeder cut another chunk of cheese off the rock-hard chunk of Swiss cheese, placing it on a slab of a Scottish scone. He offered it to his shipmate, Seaman Bucky Black.

"You have to be kidding!" Buck White replied, barfing what remained of his breakfast into the North Sea.

Wilhelm chuckled at the hard-bitten G-man who became one of Churchill's top American spies. "Eating helps land-lubbers who can't handle a wee bit of a breeze on the ocean," he said in a lily Gaelic tone as he caught another glance of Captain Leary at the helm, officially the men-in-charge of the fishing boat flying to flag of the neutral Emerald Isle. "How in hell did ya get over ta the isle of bitches and bastards, lad?"

"I FLEW to England," White affirmed, ready to heave up another pound of his intestines. "And took pills when I had to take a boat anywhere else. Which SOMEone took out of my napsack before we got on this tub."

"Took up too much room, don't ya know," Wilhelm smirked. "Needed room fer other things. Like this..." The German gypsy took out a bottle of rum, reading the relevant contents. "Hoch...somethin'. Made in Germany, by the label and the smilin' lass on the label. Ten parts devil water. Another twenty parts distilled alcohol. Another eighty parts somethin' a lot stronger than apple juice, or mare's piss, don't ya know, lad, with a tincture of..."

Before Wilhelm could throw more of the Blarney Buck's way, White had emptied half of the contents of the bootleg German moonshine into his gut. Captain Leary, armed with a smile, two pistols under his belt, and a submachine gun under his coat, snuck a look back at his passengers. Wilhelm gave him a thumbs up. White retreated into being a semi-literate, semi-smart idiot, the cover Wilhelm designed for him, provisionally accepted by his American 'boss' and funder.

Buck gazed at goods in the hold below, a collection of black market goods from Germany, Russia, England and even some Finish delicacies that would fetch top dollar. Food, booze, heroin, guns, ammunition and, if Buck's suspicions were right, or gagged human cargo who were now property for a rich patrons somewhere for purposes Leary never asked. "So, 'Uncle Billy'. Where are these Irish pirates taking us?"

"Switzerland on the Sea, just like I paid 'em to," Wilhelm flung back at his 'slow' nephew, who was being taken home to his brother.

"It's MY money, Wilhelm, and I told you we have to go to Gdansk."

"The best black market port in Poland," Wilhelm replied.

"Where we pick up Karen, and the child, as planned."

Wilhelm hesitated.

"And Elena, if Karen agrees to it." Buck added.

Wilhelm remained silent, worried. He looked at the radio in the napsack.

"That was the drop off point where Karen and Elena said they would be. Correct."

“Yes, Sir, But there was something about her voice....”

“What?” Buck said, wondering why Wilhelm seemed so uncertain, and why the man who considered no one his superior was calling him ‘Sir’. “You smell something wrong?”

Wilhelm sniffed the deck. “Fishy....Everything is so fishy.”

One of Captain Leary’s men strolled by. Buck pretended to smell the material under the deck, letting his lips go big, his tongue move into a sloppy lisp. “Because this is a fishing boat, Uncle Billy?”

Leary’s man smirked. Wilhelm rolled his eyes. Buck pretended to be the ‘family idiot’ he was assigned to be. At first, taking on that role seemed degrading. But now it was...colorful, even ‘fun’. As Leary’s number three man hoisted another round of ‘fish’ from the ocean into the hatch below, and talked with his number two pirate, Buck felt honored, and vindicated. What he taught at Camp X was correct. The person who acts dumb and listens smart always becomes the wisest, and stays alive the longest. Listening to Wilhelm boast about his days robbing the English as an Irish smuggler for the IRA gave him pause to worry. Was Wilhelm buying his own bullshit which he inserted within the tall cover tales? Was he one of those supermen who could over-estimate his own power, and be overpowered by others? Most importantly, could he really be trusted? So often, when asked which side of the war he was on, he would say, ‘The side with the money’.

But there was no choice. The plan was set in motion. Captain Leary would get them to Gdansk, a port the Germans kept ‘open’ to black market trade for the good of their own country, and Cause. The Irish fishing boat would transport White’s acquired human cargo to be picked up to Sweden, no questions asked. But what of Gdansk, and that ‘something’ in Karen’s voice on the radio. If indeed it WAS Karen on the radio, that it.

CHAPTER 49

As the sojourn West continued, the path led to places Karen's father had told her about in those wondrous days when she was his daughter, and he was her father, and no other relationships in the world mattered. The 'Amber Road' was indeed a winding path that despite the charred trees and burnt bodies, seemed to have a wondrous resiliency in the soil. Elena kept the maps, Karen made sure that 'no goodnicks' were out of their way. Vladimir enjoyed every bump in the road.

The trio had been on horseback for what seemed like an eternity, walking when they had to, riding when they could. Travel by water was, according to Elena, and sound wisdom, too easy to be trusted. Anyone could be detected, shot, arrested or interrogated. Only mountain goats and mountain women were strong, and stupid, enough to travel the high country. Still, as the first cloud of ocean air moved into their nostrils, even Elena breathed it in with a sigh of relief. Looking at the shimmering blue over the horizon that was NOT a mountain, or another plateau, Karen smiled. She put Vladimir on her shoulders.

"See that, Vladimir!" she said. "That is a big pond. And you know what is on the other side of the water you see?"

"More fucking water," Elena blurted out.

"And beyond the water?" Karen squeaked out.

"Om? Om Om..." came from Vladimir's mouth.

Elena shrugged, thinking back to the times that Vladimir would watch with fascination while Yolinki would chant that penetrating montra at Illya's farm. "Om. Our son-of-a-fascist pig is a Buddhist. Om...Om...Om..."

"HOME, across the waters." Karen put her arm on Elena's trembling shoulders. "Home for ALL of us."

"And if Mister White and Mister Churchill say otherwise?" Elena challenged.

"I'll talk to President Roosevelt," Karen assured her.

"And if he vetos our proposal?"

"Professor Einstein. I know where he lives, and he is very persuasive. Though he is a terrible sailor, always getting lost in his own universe after he sails beyond the breakers."

Elena smiled, then laughed. Karen knew that she had much to lose. As one of Stalin's worst enemies, she could easily be traded back to 'Uncle Joe' out of a good will gesture by any one of Karen's bosses. Then again, there was no turning back. It was America or bust.

Karen finally set herself to ask the 'are we there yet' question, looking to what she thought was West under the gray sky and shadowless rocks. "I didn't think Gdansk was that small?"

"You're right. It isn't." Elena said. "That's Lembuk."

"Lembuk?" Karen challenged. "I thought we were going to..."

Elena dropped her head, hiding her eyes. "You are looking North, not West. And that is..."

"Lembuk...Russia." Karen said.

“In 1641 it was Poland,” she giggled.

“And in 1943. It’s...”

“...Where we have to go,” Elena said. “Everything’s been arranged.”

Elena kissed Karen on the cheek, took Vladimir by the hand, and mounted him on a horse. As Karen grabbed her horse, she heard a click.

“What the hell are you!?” the American expatriate said to her Russian lover, looking straight into the business end of her rifle.

“Don’t follow me. Please. You go West, I go East.”

“And Vladimir comes with...”

“Me!” Elena blasted out, aiming at Karen’s head. “Everything’s been pre-arranged.”

Vladimir seemed confused. Karen felt a more adult emotion.

“Everything’s been arranged by who?” she pressed.

Elena couldn’t answer. She shook with fear, terror then the kind of guilt that no God, Commissar or Prime Minister would absolve.

“Everything’s been arranged by WHO!” Karen repeated again, and again, edging closer in to Elena, tears streaming down the Russian turncoat’s cheek.

“Us,” a voice rang out from behind the trees.

Karen turned around, the bush behind her turning into a squad of uniforms, Red Army insignias on them all. Well armed, and, most dangerously, well fed individuals who seemed to have no individualism at all. The men surrounded Karen. The officer took the child. He turned to Elena.

“The Housepainter’s boy, Comrade Major?” he said with respect.

“And hers,” Elena related.

The Officer inspected the child and the mother. The birthmarks were where they were supposed to be. All measurements according to published data. Hair and eye color according to his written description. “Splendid!” he said. “Comrade Stalin will be quite pleased, as will the Soviet People.”

Karen was stripped of her Russian uniform, cuffs put on her wrists and ankles. Elena took off her ‘Karen’ wig, and was presented with a new coat, a decoration put on it. The officer saluted her. She saluted back. “I want a word with the prisoner, alone, please, Captain.”

“Of course, Colonel,” he said, joining his men.

Vladimir spoke the word most relevant. “Why?” “Why?” he smiled out at all the confusion and changing of uniforms as he was taken away by his new ‘Daddy’.

“Yes, why?” Karen asked her captor, and perhaps still-beloved.

Elena took a locket out of her pocket, opening it to a picture inside.

“Your daughters?” Karen surmised.

“In a Gulag. For ‘safe keeping’ until I....” Elena’s throat swelled up, her words held hostage by emotions that seemed impossible for her to feel.

“What’s going to happen to Vladimir?” Karen asked.

“What is...necessary, for all of us. AND the world.”

“And Mother Russia?”

“Uncle Sam’s survival depends on ours, no matter what Mister Churchill says, Karen.”

“What do YOU say, Elena?”

Karen waited for ‘Colonel’ Elena’s reply, as did the Officer watching her. Without Karen’s hair and back in her Native Country’s uniform, Elena looked every inch the Colonel. Matching expectations, she acted as such as well, slapping Karen across the face, then hiding her own.

The Spring ice over the ocean was thin, but it was still ice. Colonel Holz looked at the shoreline through the binoculars from the port side of U-145. “So, this is Lembock,” he commented to his second in Command. “You are SURE that this is where the mother and child are, Captain Wilson?”

“I thought the High Command made me a Major,” Wilson countered.

“They’ll make you a corpse, or a bar of soap, Major, if you take me or any of my men on any more wild duck chases,” Holz affirmed softly with a very big stick.

Normally, Wilson would have corrected his colleague on the ‘wild duck’ reference to ‘geese’, but his goose would indeed be cooked if very much more time passed before reclaiming the the “Housepainters’ child and capturing, or killing, his mother. Still, Wilson’s did hear the radio transmissions correctly, Elena, Karen or some other woman on their frequency announcing to the Soviet High Command that a ‘Christmas child’ is coming to Lembock. German technology, combined with Wilson brains, had recently traced the source and deciphered some of the content the radio messages between Karen radio and White. However, the Russian winter forced the German army out of the Port City. It was now solidly, and enthusiastically, in the hands of the Red Army, who answered to the Bolsheviks, who all answered to Stalin, who, according to rumor, was planning on sending the child back to Hitler in several packages. As for its mother, her fate would be far worse. Such were the thoughts going through Wilson’s mind, as he planned for contingencies, possibilities and prospects.

“You are thinking again, Major Wilson,” Holz noted proudly.

“Yes, Colonel.”

“It is dangerous to think too much on the Russian Front,” Holz noted, with authority.

“So, what do we do on the Russian Front?” Wilson dared to inquire.

Holz gazed at the small dots on shore. The large collection of men men moving quickly on machines and horses to the West. The smaller ones on foot trudging slowly to the East, on what would be their graves. “We get done what we have to, and get out,” he proclaimed, fear in his voice.

“What about the Untermench?” Wilson asked. “We WILL win this war against them, won’t we?”

“Of course we will,” Holz sighed with a sense of doom well beyond pessimism. “Our Furher has ordered us to.”

Holz didn’t have to say another word. It was on his face. Wilson knew that the only way to save his own bacon, and perhaps the life of his newly-found Fatherland, was to rescue the heir to its throne. As for the boy’s mother, the potential ‘Queen’ of the Third Reich, she would have to take her chances with the Housepainter.

“Your plan,” Holz said. “It sounds wise. There is every reason why it should work.”

“You think so?” Michael said.

“I know so!” Holz proclaimed with pride, laying his hand on Wilson’s shoulder with pride. It was the same kind of pride that Michael’s father expressed when he sent his favorite son off to Harvard, then to Wall Street, where he made a killing for the Wilson ‘home team’. For better or worse, Germany was Michael’s home team now, as it was clandestinely for others in his caste, including all-American Charles Lindburgh. Though Michael Wilson was once a Socialist, he knew that Stalin was bad for Germany AND America. The only hope for a stable, prosperous or even free world was a German-American Alliance, made possible by defeat of Russia, which would start by humiliating Stalin. By snatching away his chance to blackmail Hitler, ‘Comrade Joe’ could go catatonic, like he did for those three days when Germany began the Invasion of the Soviet Union, taking territory as fast as one could drive a

tank or truck across it. Three days when the Red Army was without any command structure, and it served Stalin right...as it did the Russian Untermench masses under him.

CHAPTER 51

“Seems like old times,” Karen thought, then sung to herself in her new ‘hotel room’. Amazingly, the accomadations were nearly identical with the Alabami Gulag to which she was sentenced for ‘life’ (if

you could call it that) back in 1934. For killing two American Capitalists in, according to Prosecutor Buck White's statement, 'the cause of World Socialism and treason against the free and God fearing United States of America.' The walls were hard, the floor cold, the windows cemented closed, a few airholes to the outside not large enough to let in sunlight, but open enough to let in the bugs. The Russian variety of the latter was a bit blacker on the shell than the American 'Carlos' cockroach, a bit smaller, but its eyes were a lot redder. The food was amazingly adequate to maintain weight, but certainly not enough to keep strong the spirits. Reboiled rotten cabbage and potatoes instead of homigreens and grits, with a few questionable bits of something 'fleshy' in it.

"Well, Comrade Cockroach," she said to the companion she valued more for company than food, so far. "Looks like they want to fatten me up. Both of us if you want to join me." She tasted the 'meat'. "Hmm...tastes like chicken, I think. Don't know where in hell anyone can find chicken in this Godforsaking, self-sabotaging country, so it must be something closer to my own species, or maybe my own species."

The possibility that she could be eating human meat didn't matter anymore. Certainly, worse thoughts came to mind when on the 'road' with her escorts. Maybe the chicken in the Alabami Pen was left over 'prisoner', perhaps 'Nigger meat', perhaps breast meat from a White girl who had been punished by elective surgery.

The roach seemed hungry, so Karen shared her meal with it. "It's probably a lovely day outside" she assured the creature with a trembling voice as the thunder outside got louder and more frequent. "Can't you hear the rain, washing down into the ground, making all the flowers yellow, the grass green, the trees--" A loud thunderbolt, very close, brought the weather report back into perspective, the roach retreating back into into the crack between the trembling walls.

"Hey," Karen said, shaking. "All is okay. Either it's God, sending down thunderbolts to shake some sense into this miserable planet which He made in his Image, Man help Him, or it's cannon fire from a German gun, a Russian gun, or maybe even an American gun. They break down the wall, we crawl out of here. They break down the roof, we don't."

Karen looked up at the lightbulb, swinging in the 'breeze' created by the rumbling guns. "There must be people running around out there," she said. "Someone who wants a safe place to hide in. Hey, but maybe, Comrade Cockroach, we're the lucky ones. Everyone out there will blow each other to bits, while we remain snug as a bug in a rug-less cell. We, who have been sentenced to die, or worse, may be the only survivors of this... 'skirmish'."

With that thought, a tear came down Karen's cheek. She thought about Vladimir. More than anything, she wanted to see him, even if for just one more time. His vocabulary was increasing, and maybe in answer to his first word, 'why?' she could tell him an answer he could understand, and use. An answer which may not be accurate, but certainly sincere.

The door to the cell opened, a single uniformed visitor entering, large visor on the head, eyes and face covered with shadows. New, freshly polished boots, with fresher spots of blood on them. The door closed behind with a slam. The only feature visible was a large bush of hair over the top lip, the expression of the mouth stoic, firm, 'emotionless' being its primary emotion.

"Comrade Stalin, I presume?" Karen smirked. "How good of you to come to my bedoir. I apologize for the mess, and my hair. Oh...I'm afraid my hairdresser cut a little too much off, but it will grow back over my ears and onto my shoulders again in a year or two, if, of course 'we' can wait that long."

The intruder said nothing, lifting a gloved hand, twirling the mustache.

"Great stash, Uncle Joe. Or is it 'Comrade Joe'. 'Master Joseph?' 'Schlep Joe'?" Karen tweaked out in her best Russian, retaining her American accent for 'flavor'.

The visitor took another step forward, standing in the light, ripping the hair off the upper lip.

“Elena.” Karen shrugged. “Isn’t impersonating the man who sent your daughters to a Goulag a no-no, punishable by---“

Elena removed a pistol from her gunbelt, aiming it at Karen. Her eyes remained cold, stoic, locked into an agenda which she had apparently been rehearsing with the utmost effort.

“Do what you have to do, my love,” Karen smiled at the woman who she still loved, though stopped respecting.

“I already have,” Elena said, handing over the gun to Karen. She crouched down, unlocked her chains, knelt and crossed herself, muttering a Russian Orthodox prayer with lightening speed, and ultimate urgency.

“What the hell are you---“ Karen blurted out.

Elena pointed to her forehead.

“What?” Karen said, holding the pistol.

Elena took Karen’s hands, her touch very sincere. The former Commandress placed the barrel of the gun on the mark designated.

“You got the jump on me, and escaped,” Elena said, the guns outside getting closer. “You took this uniform and made a run for it..”

Karen got a closer look at the uniform in question, the boots, and the source of the blood. “You tried to slash your own wrists, Elena?”

“A stupid way to die. I had to find an effective way to die. Please.” Elena moved Karen’s hands further away. “The gunshot will look more convincing from this distance.”

“But your daughters?”

“Will only be safe if my death is in the line of duty. I have to keep my eyes open, facing you, so it won’t look like an accident, or that I was asleep at my post, or you shot me while we were making love and---”

“---And our son?” Karen said from the bottom of her heart, channelled though the most active part of her brain.

Elena pointed to her pocket. Karen pulled out and read the note.

“Now, swallow it,” Elena ordered.

Karen heard footsteps outside. Marching footsteps, with several doors opening. Then another barrage of artillery. Then gunshots from inside the building, and ‘thud’ of dropping bodies.

“You go out the South corridor. To your right after you walk over my corpse, and spit on it!”

“But...”

The echo in the hallways got louder, closer. “Now! Please!”

Karen shook her head 'no'. Elena took her hand, pressing her finger against the trigger.

The next few seconds felt like an eternity. All Karen could see was Elena's eyes. All she could feel was her lover's fingers forcing her own to pull the trigger, sending her to eternity. All she could think about was Vladimir.

With a single shot, coordinated to a booming artillery shell outside, it was over. Elena lay dead on the floor, a smile frozen on her face. Karen's face, and the brain behind it, would never be the same again.

CHAPTER 52

The harbour was as chaotic as the cell back in the Alabama hotel was quiet. Shells flew in from from ground and sky, Russian soldiers manning artillery positions, or forming them. Retreat into the woods was made difficult by a surprise attack from a Panzer division, converting the trees into rubble. It was every man, woman, child and cockroach for him/herself.

“Comrade Colonel!” a confounded Seargent trying to hold together confused and terrified ‘enlisted’ men said to Karen. “What do we do?” At a loss for words, information, and perspective, she came up with the only command that made sense. “Hold your position. Retreat if you have to.”

“But Order 227 says ‘not one step backward’, Colonel.”

“Fuck Order 227. Mother Russia needs us Alive to fight for her.”

“But...”

“I’ll take responsibility.”

“Yes, Comrade Colonel,” he saluted back, smiling with gratification and gratitude. Finally, an officer who understood that soldiers were more valuable than bullets, or real estate.

As the shells fired, Karen moved to the next ‘position’ in the line that was forming. For better or worse, the single command to the Seargent resulted in a unification of strategies and spirits across the lines. Instead of seven Russians falling for one German killed, it looked ‘even’, or perhaps even turned around. The Russians were killing Germans on land and sea, three enemy dead for one Russian shot, or wounded. The line would be held, and even expanded.

But there was another matter to be dealt with. There was no time to lose in getting to Vladimir’s hiding place, which was hopefully still a safe place. Grabbing a map, and looking at it herself, rather than trusting Elena to do the navigating, Karen ascertained where she was and where she had to be. It would be a matter of time till she was ‘found out’ by the Russian troops she had just galvanized into a fighting force with one, simple, and human command. Those same troops who she instantly dedicated herself to would shoot her in an instant if they knew who she was, and what she did to Comrade Elena in the cell. Escape from the battle and quick rescue of Vladimir was the only way to vindicate Elena’s death, and give meaning to her life. Elena’s daughters’ lives depended on it, as did Vladimir’s, as did the lives of the German and Russian soldiers assigned the job of killing each other by their officers in the back lines.

Still wearing Elena’s uniform, Karen’s eye spotted a jeep, its driver dead over the wheel, dead passengers in the back seat. It worked, the gas tank still, hopefully, filled enough to get out of town. Miraculously, the escape route mapped out was effective, clouds of gunfire covering her escape from the harbor converted now into what seemed to be a victorious stand for Mother Russia against an invading Army of Nazis from sea and land. Omenously, one of the corpses in the back of the jeep came to life, celebrating the event with a victory sign.

“It’s okay, I’ll get you to a hospital,” she pledged the wounded man.

“No hurry,” he said, in English. Emerging from the back seat, the wounded soldier showed his face.

“Michael?” Karen gasped, seeing the man very healthy indeed, with plain clothes under an apparently burrowed blood-soaked Russian uniform. She pulled the vehicle over to the side of the road, into a collection of trees that still had its leaves attached.

“Karen,” Michael exclaimed with glee, taking off her hat. “Karen?” he asked again, noting the drastic change in her appearance since they last cast eyes on each as Comrades, friends and lovers.

“Bad hair day?” she smiled, embarrassingly at the very male military issue hair doo she had become very used to, but now felt self-conscious about.

“I’ve been looking for you for months!” Michael said. “I’ve come to take you home.”

“To the Heartland, or the Fatherland?” Karen advanced, her emotions ruling her brain.

Michael tightened his lips.

“I was just joking,” Karen smiled. “Ya know, both of us ARE working for the same side. We play these games, put on these disguises. But we are both on the same side. Side by side. A family of misfits, rebels and revolutionaries who are trying to make the Revolution RIGHT this time, in any country we---“

Karen’s rant and political fishing expedition was halted by a click of a Luger, a special issue from Hitler himself. “Vladimir” Michael demanded, coldly. “Where is he?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” she said, holding her eyes in fixed position.

“Interesting,” Michael said. “You have been trained well.”

“What?”

“Lying with a straight face. Like the straight arrow Buck White trained you to be.”

“US to be,” Karen said. She turned to Michael. “There is just one thing I want to know. And, whatever you do to me, I want, and deserve, an honest answer.”

“Sure,” Michael said, warmth coming to his eyes. “I DO want what’s best for you. For us, if you’ll let me make it happen---“

“---That incident when you were leading a cavalry charge of Ukranian Nationalists against Russian partisans who were fighting the Germans.”

“Huh?” Wilson said, fixed position of his eyes and pupils.

Karen filled him in on the details of the event she and her escort witnessed from atop the hill. From Michael taking out his sword, to his leading the charged against the Stalin-supporting partisans with a ‘heil Hitler’, To his personally cutting down a Red Army officer with what looked like a personal vengeance.

“You don’t remember me telling me about my brother, Jim, do you,” Michael said.

“The journalist who died in that car accident before I went to the Big House.”

“After he witnessed what Stalin did in the Ukraine in 1932. Taking away all of their food, killing a third of them with starvation, deporting another third, leaving the rest to become...” Tears came to his eyes, real ones.

Karen found her arms around her ex-lover, and now re-found friend. “What happened?”

“NO one in the West knew about it, or was supposed to. But Jim insisted on going to the Times with the story.”

“And the accident?”

“A Russian immigrant was driving the car. Dumb ass dock worker to the untrained eye. But one of the smartest agents that Joe Stalin ever trained. Or got out of the country quickly, confidentially, AND with the approval, and help, of the AMERICAN State Department.”

“That’s not...”

“Yes, it DID happen. The deaths in the Ukraine. Jim being killed because he leaked the story. The Times and certain ‘Socialist’ members of the State Department, who WE used to know, being quiet about the whole story.”

“Why?”

“1934, Hitler coming to power. Giving him ammunition to get more power.”

“Which he has now,” Karen lamented.

“And which he deserves to have!” Michael proclaimed proudly and defiantly. “We were idealists thinking that Socialism would work, but we were wrong. There IS a master race, and we are a part of it. If we or the Germans were in charge of Russia, the Ukrainian holocaust would never have happened. A Master Race selectively weeds out inferior and defective races, and people, but not whole populations and entire countries. We have the obligation to rule so that the Untermench, who are stupid enough to obey Stalin and too afraid to stand up to him, don’t get control of the world.”

“Hmmm...” Karen said, hiding her face, and her thoughts behind it. “I see.”

Michael looked at his former lover, and newfound wife, according to his best intentions. “I don’t think you do see,” he surmised. Aiming the gun at her again. “But it is my firm conviction that you will.”

Michael kissed Karen, on the lips, gun still pointed at her head.

She gave him nothing back except pity.

“Hmmm...” he smirked smugly. “That’s a start, my dear.”

CHAPTER 53

Leary’s ship pulled into Gdnask, on schedule. The dock assigned to the Irish fishing boat was at the darkest end of the harbour, the last port out. Leary’s men figured it was because the Poles and Germans thought themselves better than Mick sailors, but their captain knew better. He instructed them to not get too hammered on the booze, not punch out too many Polacks, and for Christ’s sake, to beware of proposing to whores who were Jewesses looking for a way out of German occupied Poland. Any other kind of contraband was acceptable to the German authorities in Poland, but as for the Jewish question, there was no question at all. No tolerance for any Jew, and even less for people who helped them out.

He went below to tend to his guests, and real paying patrons. He found it odd that one of the lads from the Easter Rebellion had a mother who was a German gypsy. But if that affiliation brought in more goods for the mothers back in the Emerald Isle, and more guns for their sons and husbands who would keep the Cause of Liberation for the two Counties in the North alive, so be it. “How ya doin’ down there, boys?” he asked his guests, still working on the radio that looked like a lot more than a radio that went dead on them. It had a screen, a rotating sensor, and some kind of radar that looked a lot more advanced than anything Leary had stolen from German U boat wrecks, or ‘burrowed’ from Her Majesty’s convoy destroyers in Belfast while the Commander of the Watch was getting drunk with his sister.

“Ist kaput!” ‘Billy’ screamed in German as another attempt to increase its operating range and receptive sensitivity did nothing except break his index finger. “Busted and bent as the King’s dick and Queen Elizabeth’s cunt!”

His assistant, the ‘idiot sailor’ with the handsome face smirked. Leary sensed that the ‘virgin moron’ was smarter than he looked, or perhaps more experienced in the ways of being a man than his uncle let on. Still, Leary’s boat was in service of the two new mates for another week. Billy’s cash was good, his contacts for contraband solid, and the take to be had quite substantial.

Leary wasn’t a man to question a golden goose, but that didn’t mean he didn’t want to help the goose lay more nuggets. “Here, lads. Let me help ya.”

Billy, aka Wilhelm, by the sounds of his curses and ramblings in his sleep, let him at the machinery.

“When did ya say yer friends were supposed to be here?” he asked.

“Three days. We had them on our screens for the last week. Clear as a bell,” Billy related, in Irish English. “Bloody machinery went to hell in a handbasket on us, don’t ya know.”

“Ain’t yer machinery lads,” Leary said, testing the device with magnets, his compass and other mechanical nic-nacks that impressed Billy as well as his silent, but ‘not-sayin’-nothin’ nephew. “It’s yer people. Or person. They either ain’t talkin to ya, or ain’t there no more, or don’t want to be found.”

Leary saw both men consider the latter possibility, something neither of them had considered. Considering it his place to keep his customers served, he offered them up a plate of bitter Irish stew. “I been in this business long enough to knows that sometimes people ya been lookin fer don’t wanna be seen. They drops out of things, all on their own. Tellin no one the why, wheres or whos behind it. They get tired in the gut, weary betwist the ears, and crazy in the head. Happens ta lots of people on the run. Specially when they’s on the run from...”

He turned to his guests. “You never did tell me what your sisters and their child was on the run from, lads.”

“No, we didn’t.” Billy replied, offering a smile, a firm ‘no’ to any more questions, a triple share of cash and another list of blackmarketeers. “We need another seven days,” he demanded.

“Which I count as five days, lads,” he said, counting the money, and number of names, knowing it was the last ace up their sleeve.

“Six.” Billy insisted.

Leary sat back and scratched his chin. “Maybe I can be persuaded ta hiring me and my ship to ya fer a Greek week, which by German, English and even Irish calculatin comes out ta ten days. With some modifications of our conditions.”

Billy looked at his nephew, both seeming to decide on the matter. After the unspoken conversation was finished, it was the 'no-brain' nephew who spoke, in very American English. "Your mother's name, county and address in Ireland."

"Is my business!" he blasted out, moving his hand over the handle of his revolver, losing no time in aiming it at the talkative 'mute'.

Meanwhile, Billy scribbled a name and address on a piece of paper, handing it to him.

Leary's mouth dropped. As did his revolver when Billy gently took it from his trembling hand.

"A Greek week, then?" the 'nephew' said. "Word of honor. On MY mother's grave."

"Or yours, and all of ours." Leary warned. "But can ya tell me one thing. Is it about money, politics or power."

"Something with even higher stakes," Billy said.

"And what in bloody hell would that be, 'gentlemen'?"

"Family," the nephew sailor said, in a tone that rang of commitment.

Leary had heard it all from everyone, but when it came to family, he could spot a lie from a mile away. "If it be that, then a Greek week you have."

"Ten days?" Billy said, with his natural German dialect.

"And not one moment longer. I ain't in business to be charitable."

"And why ARE you in business, then, Captain Leary?" the American asked.

"Family," his concise reply, to which he gave no further explanation.

CHAPTER 54

The room had thick, stone walls. A fortress protected by armaments dating back to the Tatars. Tall ceilings that kept in all echoes, screams and secrets. Ghosts behind every wall, to the ear open to hear their whispers. Karen Lubinska sat in the middle of it, her captor, and interrogator, across an oak table.

"So," she said looking at the cathedral ceiling of the thousand year old structure. "This is your family's castle, Michael?"

"Yes, indeed," he said, pulling out an oak chair for his guest, cushioned with velvet, padded by goose feathers. "Before they moved to Denmark, then Scotland, then New England."

He gazed at the blonde locks flowing down Karen's shoulders and down her back. Not quite the same color as her original hair, but the best wig available, the strands of hair soft, full and angelic.

He bowed slightly, the waistcoat around his chest revealing the best of his truly Herclean physique.

Playing along with the game she found herself enjoying, she gently adjusted the skirt on her floor-length evening gown, adjusting the sleeveless straps around her breasts to a tasteful presentation of what was still, to her surprise, a very feminine expression of her womanhood.

"You know," he said as he lit another one of the candles at the dinner table set with the finest china available during peacetime OR wartime. "Your ancestors could have built this castle with mine."

"Who did the building and who did the contracting?" she mused.

"It doesn't matter now," Michael said. "The castle got built. And will outlive us, our children, and probably even your child."

"Who is probably dead," she repeated, biting her lip, holding back her tears. "Sent down the Volga in a basket to---"

"---Yes, I know," he interrupted, condescendingly. "The new Moses."

"Someone has to deliver the Jews from those Camps that don't exist," she asserted.

Michael said nothing. He answered the accusation with music, a recent recording of Tristan Und Isolde, on a phonograph that highlighted the music rather than the scratches between the notes.

"Holz!" he barked out.

An elderly man with a chisel-featured face and sternly subservient bearing emerged from the kitchen with the wine, pouring a sample of it into Karen's glass. The waiter seemed to be well above his assigned station, but he served his function as servant with a mastery of its graces, subtleties and expectations.

Karen sniffed the wine, and on the verge of tasting it, offered a sip to her host first. "Michael? It is customary for the host to...ya know."

"Yes, quite," he said, tasting the contents of the hundred year old bottle. He pursed his lips. "Quite." He smiled, then instructed the waiter to pour a glass for himself. The old gentleman agreed, doing his duty, then retreating to his position at the wall to await further instructions.

Karen tasted the 'brew'. Quite tasty. Just like the old days with the big whigs. "Quite acceptable," she smiled in the manner of a perfect Lady in ANYone's Court, or courtroom.

Michael snapped his fingers. "Holz!" he screamed out with a smile. "The first course!"

"Yes, Sir," the old gentleman said, entering the kitchen, head bowed.

Michael took his seat. Karen took stock of what was happening. She felt---clean, and privileged. Like all the pain, humiliation and fear of the War had vanished, and it would never come back. She knew Vladimir was out there, in a location known only to her, but the lad was resilient, and Elena was resourceful. He would be safe, at least for the night. As long as Karen didn't speak, or even think, about him. And as long as she listened more than she talked, she could, perhaps learn what Michael didn't want to tell her about HIS world, and private agenda.

Holz came out of the kitchen with soup. REAL soup containing meat, FRESH vegetables, and an ingredient Karen hadn't had in anything for months. "Flavor!" she exclaimed upon tasting it.

"And taste," the blue-blood Bostonian related with distinction and flair. "Like this music, Tristan Und Isolde. About the Irish legend of true love that goes beyond death."

"Yes, indeed," Karen said with a broug, and meant with her heart.

"Wagner. Who reminds us that it was the Vikings who brought Fire and Warmth to the Emerald Isle, long before the Church of England and the Catholic Church tried to sterilize it."

"Yes," the half-Irish Lubinska agreed. "My Irish mother used to listen to this."

"Even though the Priest told her it was Pagan."

"Not quite," Karen said. "She wasn't Christian. Her grandfather was from Spain, kept their religion secret. The most Catholic Jew this side of--"

Michael laughed, interrupting the telling of the pedigree. Holz looked at Karen and Wilson disapprovingly. "You do make up amazing stories about your Catholic mother. Once a Catholic, always a Catholic, you know."

"Yes," Karen said, sensing something going on between Master and Servant of the house that was not quite by the numbers.

"You know, the Furher was once Catholic," Michael said, instructing Holz to bring in the next course.

"Yes, I've heard that," Karen said.

Holz brought out a turkey, a magnificent bird cooked to perfection, topped with orange sauce and adorned with cranberries and walnut dressing. It was Karen's favorite. A fact that Micheal remembered from the past when they were madly love with World Socialism, and each other.

Holz lifted up the knife, asking permission of his Master to cut the bird. Michael nodded his approval. Holz performed his duty with skill and precision, each slice perfectly shaped, artistically placed amidst the trimmings.

"You know, Karen, my dear," Michael said. "If Hitler were here, he would not partake of this meal. He's a vegetarian, you know. Very kind to animals."

"Yes, I have heard," Karen replied.

"And very generous to children, particularly those he feels close to."

"I suppose." She bit her tongue, and tried to close her mind.

"And he is not angry with you at all," Wilson continued.

"Why?" Karen asked, imitating the child whose whereabouts she alone now knew.

Michael didn't notice the deviation in character or voice. Holz did, missing a cut on the turkey, nearly slicing into the bird's chest.

"I mean," Karen said. "He was quite rough with me the last time we, ya know..."

“He was under a lot of pressure,” Michael said.

“Planning a surprise invasion of a country you pledged not to attack will do that,” Lubinska blasted out sarcastically. “Does he miss me?”

“Yes,” Wilson said, with an emotion Karen didn’t think possible from his new persona. Sincerity. “We all miss you, Karen. All of us who can make the world a more orderly, rational and prosperous place.”

“And free place?” she challenged.

Wilson took in a deep breath. Collecting his thoughts rather than his fuming passions, he instructed Holz to serve up the turkey and the embellishments around it.

“Karen. LADY Lubinska. Freedom is a complicated issue. First comes economic security. Then cultural pride.”

“And racist bigotry?” she challenged, noting Holz’s hands and eyes. Steady this time. Michael wiped his brow, then slammed his fist on the table.

“Sir?” Holz asked in a soft, subservient and concerned tone.

“Carry on, Holz,” he commanded.

“Yes, Sir,” the old gentleman replied with a bow of obedience, commencing with his assigned duty.

“Look, Karen!” Wilson said. “I can make a life for you AND that child you say you don’t know anything about. A life of dignity. Respect. And freedom. There is no freedom in death, which is what will happen to BOTH of you.”

Karen looked at the meat on her plate, fondling it with her hands, ignoring the forks and other instruments of proper etiquette.

Michael continued the ‘lesson’, and the deal. “You were born to inferior parents, socially, and economically speaking, agreed?”

“Got me there, partner,” she said, munching on the bird peasant style, her stomach screaming out for badly needed food as quickly as it could be delivered.

“I was born to a more powerful station.”

“If you say so,” she replied, food in her mouth.

“You KNOW so, Karen,” he blasted between her eyes in that ‘way’ a ‘Wilson’ always got his way, in matters of money, business, politics and love. “But your genes are...noble. And your mind, brilliant. And your body is...”

“A perfect specimen?” she asked, food spilling from her mouth.

“Yes.” Michael said, despite the eyebrow roll from Holz which the old man couldn’t or wouldn’t keep inside. “You, Karen Lubinska, could help establish a new world order.”

“With what I know, where I’ve been, who I know, or what I am?” she challenged.

“All of the above, my love.”

Holz shook his head. Wilson snapped his fingers, dismissing him from the table, and the room.

“He doesn’t know his place,” Michael related by way of explanation. “And I KNOW that you know yours. And the proper place for a child who is better off with you, here, than someone else someplace else.”

Karen considered the issue. Michael had a point. All she had to do was relate where the child was, and everyone would still be alive. Maybe by saying ‘yes’ to the deal, she could mold the Third Reich in her image, or allow it to shape her in ways that worked for her. There was something appealing about the whole thing, from this perspective. The Nazis couldn’t have been ALL about Concentration Camps, Blitzkriegs and biological experiments on the ‘Untermench’. Every other country flexed its muscles, tried to exert its effects on the world. Maybe by playing along with the orchestra, she could manipulate the conductor into playing a different tune. ‘Change the system from within’ as the motto went when she and her idealistic friends graduated college and faced the decision of joining a corrupt American State Department or fighting for justice on the streets and the picket line. But there was something else. Something on the plates besides the turkey, cranberry sauce and orange-flavored stuffing.

“This swastika,” she said. “Is it about power, honor, or love?”

She left the decision to Michael. He got up, looked at the object in question, smiled and broke out in song. “Tomorrow belongs to me,” he sung. Karen remembered the German anthem of the Hitler Youth, its lyrics saying ‘power’, its music reeking of warmth. She felt a chill in her spine, a warm feeling in her chest, and the last person she sang it to. She saw Vladimir’s eyes in front of her, trying to imagine what kind of boy, and man, he would grow up as wearing that symbol of the ideology that fascinated half the world and terrified the rest. She saw him walking with a straight back, then marching with a firm beat, speaking with a firm voice...but with another symbol on his armband.

“America,” she said. “If my Moses is still alive and gets found, I’d like to raise him in America, land of...”

Before Karen could modify the dream, or the plan in mind, she heard a loud gunshot. The smoking gun lay in Holz’ hand, the bullet served up the ‘Master Michael’, bleeding his life’s blood over the dead bird.

“We do it MY way now!” he blasted out at Wilson. Before Karen could sneak out the door, he directed the barrel of the gun at the back of her head. “I assure you, my dear, that if you make me shoot, I will not miss, and you will suffer the consequences very severely. Everybody talks, and the sooner you do, Frauline, the better it will be for you and that Jewish brat of yours.”

“My mother was Catholic, not---“

“----Hands up in the air, Jew!” he screamed.

Karen raised her hands in the air. Holz tied them behind her back.

“Where are we going?” Karen asked.

“Nowhere before I get my final satisfaction, bitch!” Michael screamed.

Holz laughed at the once proud all-American tycoon’s son stumbled across the floor like an deformed Jewish gimp, spilling his guts out on the floor, his fist clenched with rage. He chuckled as ‘Major Wilson’ grabbed hold of Karen’s collar like a common footsoldier with his left hand, punching her in the stomach then below it into her ‘womanly’ parts with a rage typical of the Untermench he felt so

superior to. “Take that, you bitch! You fucking bitch, you goddamn, heart-breaking, turncoat, bitching cunt!”

Holz shook his head with ultimate smugness as Karen saw Michael fall to the ground to breath his last. He left her with a lingering memory, a bloody chest, and something very unexpected in her vagina. Something from the ‘good old days’ when they were still allies, perhaps friends.

CHAPTER 55

“Is that what I think it is?” Wilhelm said, watching the radar screen on the radio/scanner/whatever it would be called after the war is over in the history books.

“It is indeed,” Buck White said with a smile not felt for weeks.

Leary walked into the hold of the ship. “Better pack up, lads. Heat’s on its way. Routine inspection from the Gestapo, the lads say. Lads who can’t be bought with anything I got on my ship or you got in your pockets...” Leary took notice of the blips on the screen. “Yer friend wantin to be found?”

“With our enemy’s tracking device. By the transmission, planted into her where the sun don’t shine,” White said.

“Und where every son of a bitch whose a man wants to go,” Wilhelm added.

“A cunt radio?” Leary said. “Interestin, lads. Maybe I could find a market for it, but we best be moving out in ten minutes or we’ll be the ones bein sold on the streets.”

“I need to see where they’re going first” White insisted.

“I know,” Wilhelm related, his blank stare focused on the map matching the coordinates and the route he knew all too well.

Leary peaked a look. “Auchwitz?” he said. “Never heard of it.”

“That’s the way the Nazi’s like to keep it,” Wilhelm sneered.

Leary figured something was afoot, something he couldn’t stay out of, even if his efforts would help his arch enemy, England. “This about family, Wilhelm?”

“Yes,” White said. “His family, and many others.”

Leary took a deep breath, and contemplated the matter. “I can’t answer for all the lads in Dublin, but if you can pay fer their arms, travel and assorted expenses, we can mop up that town soon as you can say Molly McGuire.

“We don’t have that kind of money,” White said.

“And you can’t muster up that many men,” Wilhelm sobbed.

“Then what the hell DO we do?”

The answer came quickly as Leary’s crew briskly walked toward the boat, getting on board, their Napsacks empty of booty, their eyes filled with fear. Not a word was spoken, The boat pulled out of Gdansk at slow and quiet speed, slipping away through the fog, delivered as a gift from Mother Nature. More gifts would be needed if they could intersect the transport of the people, or person, in question to the Camp where people entered, and corpses went out.

CHAPTER 56

Holz knew that an SS Colonel in an open jeep driving through occupied territory was an engraved invitation for any Partisan to take a pot shot. He also knew that carrying bags of money, now under his possession, would draw fire from local desperados yearning to be heroes. He banked on the fact that a half-naked female prisoner tied into the front seat would arouse the more romantic instincts of Poles seeking revenge on the Germans, or glory for themselves. One jeep, one driver, one Colonel and one damsel in distress.

“What I’m concerned with is what is behind that jeep, or on the side roads ahead,” a more elderly resistance fighter said from atop the hill overlooking the road to Auchwitz, a very personal agenda behind his caution.

“And the man escorting the prisoner?” White asked Wilhelm. “You know him.”

“Everyone knows Colonel Holz,” the troll-like gnome droned out.

“Not like you do, Billy,” Leary noted, and stated.

Wilhelm’s pale face turned beet red, then ghostly white. O’Leary consulted with his men. Buck White took a higher vantage point. “He’s being followed, alright,” he noted, pointing to four armoured cars not a quarter mile behind the ‘bait’, at least twice as much support on the port and starboard pastures along the one-lane road with deep ditches on either side.

Wilhelm’s eye remained vengefully fixed on Holz’s throat. White’s attention lay on the American-Jewish prisoner next to him who looked badly beaten, drugged or worse. Leary focused on something more practical to the matter at hand. “The money in the back of that jeep. Whose is it?”

“Yours when my plan works,” Wilhelm said.

“IF it works,” White asserted. “And I thought you were on the side of this war who has the money.”

“Well,” Wilhelm retorted. “When these Irish Knights finish their part in my plan, they’ll have the money.”

“And be dead before they can spend a dime of it,” White insisted. “We need air support from London.”

“My farts have more power in them than anything London gave to my people, or Captain O’Leary, when the chips were really down,” Wilhelm let go a flatulent blast of gas from his bowels, evoking nods of agreement and chuckles of approval from the Irish ‘conscripts’ to the Cause.

Leary did the counting, the tally of exposed and supposed deutchmarks representing 10% of the reward posted on ‘Lady Lubinska’s’ head. “Fer that kind of money, me and the lads will make this work.”

“We have to think of the child here,” White said as the lead car made the turn to the pre-designated point of attack, a narrow slope in the valley protected by trees and rocks, which were hopefully not protected by snipers.

“We have no time to think, just to succeed.” Wilhelm motioned Leary and his men to their mounts, quick footed Polish Arabians bought from farmers who seemed trustworthy, stolen from those who were not. Leary and his men took off their sailor coats, looking quite sharp in the contraband Nazi uniforms acquired during their careers as merchants. Having been discovered in the harbour by the SS, those careers would now have to be oriented towards an Allied victory. Wilhelm removed his over-clothes, a rag of an ‘outfit’ underneath, bearing a Star of David on the right shoulder of the pin-stripped ‘labor suit’, insignias designating Gypsy and Homosexual on the left, a fresh tattoo painted on his forearm. Having just shaved his head, saying a prayer in Hebrew, with a lisp, he looked the part to be played.

White reflected on the plan again. “You are sure of this, Wilhelm?”

“Yavol, Herr Major,” he said in German, giving Buck a ‘Heil Hitler’ with his left arm, the third digit prominently displayed in the extended hand.

White took off his coat. He looked at the uniform, a tailor fit SS special. He removed his hat from his seaman’s dufflebag, adjusting it on his head.

“There is something I have to tell you, Wilhelm.”

“Yes, Herr Major!” he barked out in the manner of a prisoner well trained to pass down the disease of cruelty to lesser prisoners.

White looked at the guns below, and the men behind them. "I've never been in action before."

Wilhelm smirked. "Neither has Eisenhower, but that doesn't stop him from being a great Supreme Commander, Herr Major."

White knew what Wilhelm really felt about Eisenhower. That he was a diplomat assigned to a warrior's post. Had Wilhelm been in charge of Downing Street and 1400 Pennsylvania Avenue, Patton or Montgomery would be given the role of Supreme Allied Commander. More men would be killed per battle, but the battles would at least be fought. Not delayed so that 'strategic advantage' could be gained, at the cost of another day, week, month or year, amounting to other casualties mounting up, in 'battlegrounds' such as Achwitz, Buchenwald and countless others the Allied Command had no way of counting. But, a mediocre or untested commander is better than no commander at all. Even a renegade soldier like Wilhelm who obeyed no orders except his own knew that.

"Du bist ready?" White asked the gnome-like companion who had become his closest friend.

"Nein! Nein!" Wilhelm ran, stumbled and rolled down the hill, falling in front of Holz's car. "Nein! Nein!" he yelled to his assailant, walking down the hill.

"What is going on here?" Holz asked the SS Colonel strolling down the hill, his luger drawn, shooting at the feet of the escaped prisoner.

"He wants me dance!" 'prisoner' Wilhelm slurred out of his mouth.

"Back to the Camp, gypsy Jew fag!" White blasted back in the pre-rehearsed words and diction Wilhelm coached him in, appended by two more bullets to his feet.

Holz found Wilhelm's gypsy's dance amusing. He laughed, sadistically. White took the opportunity to see for himself how badly Karen was really doing. He hardly recognized her, beyond her shaved head. Her eyes lacked their sparkle and fire. Her skin seemed decades older than when he first saw and touched it. Her mouth lacked the wit and rebellion he had heard on the radio, two words coming out, something in very ethnic Polish about her Grandfather, two words she held on to remembering above all else.

"Enough non-sense!" Holz declared, slapping her across the mouth. "I can't hear the Jewish fag dance!"

Holz got out of the jeep, clapping with the festivities. The troop cars from behind arrived, screaming to a halt. Some of the troops laughed, others shook their heads, others hid their eyes. Holz looked at his watch, signalling them ahead. "We'll catch up with you later," he declared. Or so it seemed from White's perspective, his knowledge of German seeming more scant than it normal.

With the security troops ahead, Holz entertained, Wilhelm made his move. A brilliant twirl, twist and turn, straight into Holz arms, punctuated by a kiss, on the lips. The driver pulled out his rifle. Wilhelm pulled a knife from under his shirt, slashing it into Holz's testicals, then grabbing his tongue, cutting it out with one swift swipe. White shot the driver with his safety pistol, equipped with a silencer.

Karen kept blurting out something in highly ethnic Polish, oblivious to everything around her.

"Grandfather's farm," Wilhelm translated, holding Holz under the heel of his shoe, carving a swastika on his chest, sparing no chance to drive the knife into his lungs.

"Which is where?" White asked, ascertaining the terrain, smelling with his inner eye pursuers to be dealt with.

“My father, mother, brother, sister and, yes, lover,” Wilhelm sneered, giving each of the aforementioned notation with a stab in the swatsika. “Yes, my lover,” he repeated. “His death will not go unavenged.”

With that, Wilhelm lay the final blow, into Holz’s heart. He bleed out slowly. Wilhelm smiled with satisfaction, wiping off the knife.

“Now, Colonel White, get in the jeep,” he instructed his American ‘boss’. “Grandfather’s farm is..” He grabbed a map, circling the coordinates. With the final stroke of the pencil, his hand dropped, blood flowing down his arm.

Where the shot came from could not be determined. The trees above opened fire. Perhaps it was Germans. Perhaps partisans with bad aim. But whoever it was, it wasn’t Leary and his men.

“Go!” Wilhelm commanded White. “Take care of Lady Karen, and the Child. And tell Vladimir which side I died for.”

“The one with with money?” White said, noting the cash from the bags in the back of the jeep flying around, floating in mid air, the larger bills landing in Wilhelm’s blood-soaked hands.

“Go...Now!” Wilhelm pleaded as the party in the bushes above moved down, their identities still not known, but their intentions to kill the Colonel and, if necessary, his half-dead prisoner, in search of revenge, perhaps. Most certainly the money behind them. Cash which, upon examination, was the first payment for finding ‘My wife and long lost son,’ the note signed ‘with gratitude, AH’

Taking what he could to pay off Leary’s men, leaving the rest behind, White floored the accelerator, leaving a trail of paper currency behind him. He dared not look behind as to who grabbed it. Only one thing mattered. Getting to ‘Grandfather’s farm’ before anyone else did, including Leary and ‘the lads’.

CHAPTER 57

Whatever Leary and the lads did seemed to work. The ride to Grandfather Lubinska’s 20 acre Old Country farm seemed just as pleasant and uneventful as the drive up to his 2 acre ‘New World’ house in Upstate New York. Green trees, blue sky, but with some new clouds between the ears.

“Tell me I didn’t say anything,” Agent Lubinska asked of her boss, yet again as she regained consciousness, and perspective, clad in a common footsoldier’s German uniform. “Please tell me I---“

“Everybody talks,” White informed her. “But I know you did your best,” he smiled, seeming to mean it.

“Shit! What did I say?”

“Something about a Grandfather, a farm and Polish purgatory, roughly translated.”

A company of Polish Hitler Youth gave the Seig Heil to the car. As Colonel in charge of the vehicle and the unassuming boys’ egos, White flexed his arm, minimizing the motion and emotion behind it. The response could not have been more enthusiastic from the 12-going-on-forty year olds.

“Is that what Vladimir is going to be one day?” Karen lamented.

“That’s what EVERY boy and girl will be one day if this deal gets screwed up.”

Karen had never heard ‘deal’ associated with Vladimir’s case. ‘Arrangement’, ‘trade’, ‘negotiation’ seemed functional. But ‘deal’ sounded cold, impersonal. As did White.

“I want him to go to America,” she said.

“So do I,” White said, eyes on the road, thoughts elsewhere.

“I insist on him coming home.”

“So did I,” the firm, and guilt-ridden reply.

Lady Lubinska slouched, letting the oversized helmet slip another inch below her forehead. Maybe in the blackness of its shadow she would see an answer. And offer a prayer that the only associate she had left in the world was really a friend.

Upon arrival at the ‘old homestead’ she couldn’t believe her eyes. Everything was just as it was described by her father and, to the best of her recollection while he was still alive, grandfather. The wooden barn roof matched together with twigs and rope. The stock pen fences composed of neatly arranged logs. The various roads and paths within the 30 acre kingdom lined with stone. The well still working, by the looks of it. Hay stacked up for winter. Wheat bags neatly piled up in the shed next to the main house, the crosses carved into its windows and doorways gently whittled by wind, rain and snow. Everything was there, except animals and people. And one person in particular.

“Elena...she.” Karen looked everywhere, screaming out Vladimir’s name. White walked the perimeter, letting the business end of the rifle acquired in the ‘gypsy dance’ act as his third eye. “He’s not...”

“He has to be here,” White found himself saying. “With everything you told me about Elena, she wouldn’t just dump him here.”

White’s bootheel felt a thud in the barn floor. Setting aside the straw, he discovered a wooden door.

“Of course!” Karen flashed on. “The Cossack cellar.”

“Where they hide Cossacks?” White said as he pried the door open with the butt of his rifle.

“Where my grandfather and grandmother hid from Cossacks, and Prussians, and uncles and aunts and priests who caught them smooching behind the Church or rolling something other than oats in the hay,” she laughed. “Vladimir!” she screamed into the enclosure. “Its me! Your mother!”

“I don’t think so!” a voice rang out from behind. Karen turned around, her pale face turning ghost white as she saw the ghost.

“Elena!” she screamed out. “How did you---!”

“---Down on the floor, Nazi bastard!” she barked out. “You too!” the command to White.

White obeyed the command. Karen turned around, slowly, lifting the visor on her helmet.

“Turn around! On the floor!” the screech. “Schnell!”

Karen continued to disobey, the click of the assailant's weapon and the firing of it at her feet not deterring her. When she looked into her face, it all made sense.

"Katerina?" she said to the young woman whose face and temper reminded her of an older one.

"How do you know my name!" she demanded to know.

"I knew your mother. I'm..."

"---We know who you are," another young woman.

"Julia. Is that you?"

Julia was well armed, and far more trigger happy than her sister. "Why does he know our names?" she barked at Katerina.

"I don't know, but if you shoot him, we'll never find out."

Karen smiled, removed her helmet, then her shirt, revealing her true gender. Then the birthmark on her left breast.

"So, you finally made it," Katerina said.

"If it's you," Julia snarled, her rifle aimed at Karen's head, and the SS Officer's testicles.

"You must be Elena's daughters," White said, in English. Karen translated.

"What's he doing speaking English?" Julia screamed.

"He's speaking American," Karen smiled.

Julia and her sister conferred on the matter, coming to the agreement that the German soldiers in their sunsights were indeed who they said they were. But as for their greeting, no smiles.

"I'm supposed to tell you, Miss Lubinska, where the child is," Julia said.

"And I'm supposed to see that no one else does," Katerina added, keeping her gun on White.

"Fair enough," White said in English, then his best Russian.

Katerina chuckled, Julia laughed at the American superspy who had cow manure on his ass and pig shit on his face.

"Did I say something?" he asked Karen.

"Stick to English, your Russian is very amusing," she said.

A smiling Karen was led away by a still-cautious Katerina. Julia kept guard on the SS Colonel, still not convinced of his true affiliation.

CHAPTER 58

The only thing between walls and the roof of the main house was a crucifix. “He’s there,” Katerina said, coldly.

“The attic?” Karen replied. “A small one, by the looks of the logs in front of the...”

“There is no attic,” Katerina said. “He’s there.” She pointed to the crucifix again. “If you believe that God exists, that is.”

Karen’s jaw dropped. Katerina smirked in that cynical way all Russians did, or had to, in order to stay sane.

“An interesting question, ‘God’”, Elena’s ‘philosophical’ daughter proposed as she looked over the horizon in each direction, anticipating other visitors. “If God exists, what does He want? For himself. From us. He must be very bitter and lonely. And stupid. If He had any sense at all, he would create a wife for himself, so he could be a little more human, and maybe understand what we, his creation has to go through if----“

Katerina’s discourse was interrupted by a knife on her throat. “Where is he!” Lady Lubinska demanded in not-so-ladylike tone. “He’s SOMEwhere here! I know it! Smell it! Just like I smell you lying, you bitch!”

Katerina remained silent, unmoved. Prepared to die, even eager for it.

“Where the hell is he!” Karen demanded, again. “And if you answer me with another smug Russian eye roll, I’ll cut out your eyes, one by one.”

“Or shoot me in the head, like my mother was executed, and stripped naked by....”

Karen lowered the knife, and her guard. “Your mother died a hero. She wanted you to know that.”

“Yes, we read it in Pravda. Died as a heroine leading the defense of Lembuk.”

“Which was successful?” Karen found herself asking, remembering the faces of the Red Army soldiers, warriors and recruits who she had inadvertently inspired to victory with a single gesture, “Defend it if you can, retreat if you must. Mother Russia needs you Alive, not dead.” Being an American to the core, the question was obvious. “Did we win?”

Katerina’s eyes turned downward, sorrow in her voice. “The Germans lost.”

“Casualties?”

Katerina pursed her lips, her voice choked in her throat. “I only have enough tears to lament for one of them.”

“Me too.” Karen felt a tear come down her face. She could feel Katerina’s grief, empathy then ridicule as the daughter of her lover, and betrayer, broke out into laughter. “What’s so fucking funny?” Karen said.

“That!” Katerina smiled back, pointing to the pig pen, a muddy figure rolling in the mud, roaring like a wild boar.

Karen turned around. The animal in question had a familiar face, and a contagious laugh to its roar. As it shook its head and snorted, she caught a glimpse of its face. “Vladimir!”

Karen’s feet carried her at a flat out run to the ‘pig boy’, lifting her spirits to the stars, and beyond. She jumped into the mud, ‘oinking’ her joy at being re-united with the ‘demon seed’ who she had learned to accept, serve and ultimately love. All seemed forgotten in that magical moment. All the dying. The pain. The heartbreak. And the betrayals. All was perfect. The answer to Vladimir’s question ‘why’ clear as Polish mud, and just as rooted in the Soil of her Soul.

The mud in the pig pen had washed away the sorrow and bitterness in Karen’s soul. But it couldn’t wash away the War, a dirty little ‘nuisance’ that loomed over every horizon, making its first introduction over the Eastern horizon. Katerina called out her sister, who escorted a cuffed Buck White.

“The Red Army,” Julia noted. “Very much in front of our lines.”

“Which means they will try to retreat back home soon,” White interjected, asking Karen to translate. Turning to an insulted Julia and a worried Katerina he continued. “A smart soldier lives to fight effectively, so he wins the war, not so he can be a hero who died for ground which will be lost.”

Translation delivered, and understood, Julia uncuffed White. “Maybe you Americans will come and rescue us?” she mused. “Of course you’ll have to get your boots wet first. You’re still lounging around in North Africa.”

“Yes, I know,” White related honestly, and apologetically, in Russian. “And I know something else,” he offered.

“The magic words to end the war?” Julia challenged.

“The way out for the boy who could stop it, right?” Karen said, hoping that is was a statement, not a question.

“Yes. All of that has been arranged.”

“And the child?” Katerina said.

“In the care of her mother,” White replied. “Orders from the High Command.”

“And in the care of her brothers,” Karen added, looking at half-sister Katerina and Julia. Gazing at a smiling Vladimir, she continued. “This wonder boy is as much my son as she’s Elena’s.”

“Who was shot by---“ White said.

“---Someone who will pay, with blood,” Karen said.

“And I’m willing to accept my punishment like a man.” White offered his pistol to Katerina, his wrists to Julia. “It was an order given by the State Department. MY State Department which I followed.”

The silence was deadening, Elena’s daughters shocked. Karen was touched, sensing some inner agenda behind White’s eyes. Was he framing himself for a murder out of practicality? A strange strategy which was under some other deeper and even more complicated plan and/or mission? Or was it something more basic, and ancient. Penance for being an instrument in Karen’s being framed for murder in 1934. Those two Tycoon love nest murders which were probably done by Michael Wilson, or profited from by such. It was for the adults to ponder the dilemmas, the youth to ask the questions, or question.

“Why?” Vladimir asked each of the adults, undoubtedly addressing the anger, fear and guilt behind each of their eyes. “Why?” he kept asking, tailoring the voice and slant of the head for each interviewee.

Karen picked him up, kissing him on the cheek. “You’ll understand when you are older.”

“And your government will understand that I was just following orders,” White said to Julia.

“And give you a fair trial?” Gulag graduate Katerina ‘stated’, her face revealing her real opinion of Soviet People’s State justice.

“We’ll make it one,” White promised. “For all our sakes.”

The Soviet soldiers approached, still not having seen any inhabitants on the farm.

White gave the maps, the co-ordinates and the alternative routes to Karen. “There’s a Mick who we’ve convinced to fight for us, and for you,” he said, putting some money into her satchel. “After you get into something more presentable to his eye, give him this money. As for the rest.” White held the remainder of the Hitler reward money in his hand. Karen grabbed it.

“I know the usual place,” she said, adjusting her vaginal ‘pocket’ for another deposit.

“I’ll look after it,” Katerina volunteered, putting it into her pocket. “For our half-brother’s passage and college education.”

White smiled. “Just as long as it’s NOT political studies, law enforcement, or a career in the military.”

CHAPTER 60

The world landscape had changed more in the four years between 1943 and 1947 than during the last forty. But for Buck White, each day was the same, as it was for every political prisoner in Goulag 245, the equivalent of Section 24 in the UK.

“They keep us fed, but not satiated. Unharmed, but still hurting. Available for release but held indefinitely,” he told the visitor who finally found her way to see him after petitioning, bargaining and bribing everyone from the guards up to Nikita Krutchev, the hero of Stalingrad who was rumored to be the next successor to the ‘People’s’ throne. “How are things with the world?” he asked the amazingly attractive woman with the weary blue eyes that had turned dull green, the long blonde hair developing streaks of grey long before her time.

“Better, I think,” Karen said, holding his blister-covered hands under the visitor’s bar. “And you?”

“Holding out,” he said. “Without regrets.” He took a bite out of the apple strudel Karen had brought him. Raisins, dates and almonds mixed together in a concoction which was made to be tasteful rather than functional. It had been so long since his tongue experienced something designed for pleasure rather than sustenance.

Karen seemed worried. More than the last visit, four months and one strudel ago. “If this were a Nazi Concentration Camp, I’d be visiting a corpse.”

“You would BE one, as would every American Jew or every American with a Jewish relative, or friend,” he said. “You know, it’s a weird thing about a war. You fight for one thing, and gain something else instead. And, my very good friend, we both have been victorious.”

Karen felt White’s warmth coming through his weary eyes. The man who officially didn’t exist knew that his sacrifice was, and still remained, appreciated. He was now a bargaining chip in another war, the Red, White and Blue against the Hammer and Sickle rather than the swastika. So far, the bullets on both sides were still inside the guns and not into the enemy. Something they both celebrated, silently.

“You know,” he said. “The history books won’t write it down, but the fact that Vladimir Hitler was living in undisclosed locations under your care, and that of her Russian half-sisters, did deter a Nazi invasion of the United States. And, according to the best intelligence and rumors I’ve received here, Old Adolf held back from invading England for a while because he heard that his life’s blood was living with Churchill. Speaking of which, how is Old Winny?”

“Elected out of office, getting older, and sicker by the day,” Karen related, somberly. “He served his purpose, I suppose. England needs diplomats now more than bulldogs.”

“And the world needs more proteges like...” White looked over the paperwork Karen had prepared in his legal defense. “This is brilliant! It might not only get me out of the clink here, but put the whole Soviet justice system on trial.”

“That was our intension,” she said. “And my ‘assistant’ is now becoming my boss. He’s reading at a college level now, writing beyond the wisdom of any college-conditioned mind I know.”

“That’s our boy, Vladimir,” Buck smiled, with a fatherly pride he never thought possible in a life unburdened by family, unnurtured by loved ones who accepted you for what you were rather than what you could do. “How’s the boy’s moral education coming along?”

“He’s intelligent. He knows that doing good for the world does good for yourself. And since he’s not a masochist, like his mother, we can expect good things from him, I think.”

“And no neo-Nazi’s out to resurrect the kind of Army that SOME of the people in OUR State Department think is necessary now?” Buck asked.

“Taken care of, Buck. Which is more than I can say about you...” Her mouth started to quiver. “You know, I DID tell the people in charge that it was me who killed Elena. Their underground hero, and apparently superspy ace-in-the-hole.”

“And I saw to it that they didn’t believe you,” White smiled back.

“Why?” Karen asked, taking another look around the visitor’s area, ensuring that Soviet technology was not yet up to the kind of auditory servailence their American counterparts were up to in their prisons. “Why did you take the rap for me?”

“Because you took the rap for Michael Wilson back in ’34. And I was part of that ‘oversight’. In the interest of National Security of course.”

“But---“

Before Karen could continue, White placed his fingers on her lips. Something in the touch said that they were connected in ways that went beyond politics, or practicality.

“The boy needs a father,” Karen asserted. “To teach him the important stuff. Like how to throw a baseball. Kick a football. Toss around the bullshit with girls when he has to...”

Buck felt the warmth of Karen's smile. Of all the struggles and hardships and political necessities, it was his greatest and most valued victory.

"Time is up!" the guard announced. The buzzer rang, announcing the end of the five minutes most valued in the life of a prisoner. But no matter how the trial would go, or who would hear it, Buck felt like a free man, and Karen Lubinska, a woman who was truly alive. Thanks to a 'demon seed' who was well on his way to converting the devil's poison into a medicine the world both needed, and, with some convincing, could believe it wanted.

